Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century

Sinnappah Arasaratnam

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Preface

A collection of essays entitled *India and the Indian Ocean 1500–1800* appeared in 1987, the fruit of some years of collaborative work by a number of scholars engaged in research on maritime history of the pre-modern period. It was planned and initiated by Professors A. Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson, with substantial contributions from both. I was assigned the essay on 'Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century', which I completed after considerable reading outside my own specialist area, namely Coromandel and Sri Lanka. Soon afterwards, Professor Das Gupta urged me to consider writing a separate monograph on maritime India in the seventeenth century. He impressed on me the need for a volume embracing all the maritime regions of India, urging that this combine the results of my own research with the increasing corpus of historiographical literature on various regions. I was persuaded by this friend and professional associate of many years; hence this book.

The flow of literature incorporating the most up-to-date research continued after 1987, and my task was rendered less and less awesome as time went on. Some areas were more favoured in this respect than others, and I recognized that there were still gaps in our knowledge. It was possible, however, to make broad and general statements of historical validity on the trends of commerce and activity along the various maritime regions. It was still necessary to engage in considerable primary research, which was done in the major published and unpublished collections of contemporary sources.

It will be seen that I am deeply indebted to a number of contemporary historians of maritime India and the Indian Ocean, whose conclusions I have used extensively in presenting this overview of the seventeenth century. I have mentioned those writings that have been particularly useful to me in the bibliographic notes

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to each chapter. Such a work was possible only because of the great advances made in the historiography of maritime India. This has truly been an international enterprise, with contributions from India, Europe and the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Japan. There have been a number of international conferences and seminars at which the results of research have been exchanged. A true community of scholars of maritime India and the Indian Ocean has developed over time, and it has been my privilege to be a part of this community, and to count within it a number of warm friendships and acquaintances.

A number of corporate bodies and individuals have assisted in the completion of this work. I have worked frequently and intensively in the following archives and libraries: Dixson Library, University of New England; Fisher Library, University of Sydney; Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague; India Office Library and Records, London; the Tamil Nadu State Archives and Library; and the National Library, Calcutta. In all these institutions I have found the utmost co-operation and assistance, for which I am most grateful. I must single out Drs Plantinga, *Chef van de Leeszaal*, for special thanks. His unfailing courtesy and good humour were invaluable during visits to the Rijksarchief in the Hague.

Most of the research and writing for this book was undertaken in the Department of History, University of New England, where I have enjoyed an atmosphere conducive to research as well as the congenial company of my colleagues. The University of New England has always supported my research, even through financially difficult times. I have been awarded grants by the Australian Research Council and the Internal Research Grants Committee of the University. There was also the University's Overseas Study Programme. All these enabled me to pursue my research from the relative isolation of Armidale, New South Wales.

Finally, there is the important contribution of the administrative staff of my department. Miss Madeleine Hyson has for many years been responsible for the successful and expeditious conversion of my clumsy handwritten manuscripts into neatly word-processed printouts. I am deeply indebted to her for her conscientious attention to this work. During her absence on leave Mrs Jean Jackson

carried out the work along the high standards set by Madeleine, for which many thanks. Thanks also to Mr Rudy Boskovic, Cartographer in the Department of Geography and Planning, who drew the maps, and to several postgraduate students who have worked as research assistants at different times.

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Ports and the Ocean

The location of ports and the rhythms of trade, in the age of sail, are largely determined by the physical facts of geography, geology and climate. This is particularly so in the Indian subcontinent where a land mass projects southwards from the Eurasian continent into the ocean, forming over 6000 kilometres of sea coast washed by the divided waters of the northern Indian Ocean–Arabian Sea on the west and the Bay of Bengal on the east. In both sectors a vast expanse of water has to be crossed to reach land, to the west and to the east, making long-distance sailing an important means of communication between the subcontinent and distant lands. While sea travel from one end of the Asian continent to the other has at times been accomplished without the need to stop over in India, generally, in historic times, India acted as a bridge between east and west. Hence the Arab name for the south-western coast of India, Malabar—the Arabic word for 'bridge' or 'crossing'.

Monsoons

India's position was further enhanced by the existence of two seasonal monsoons during the year in the northern Indian Ocean. In the words of a climatologist, 'nowhere else on the globe is the annual reversal of wind and rainfall regimes as spectacular as in the realm of the Indian Ocean and surrounding land areas.' Just as these monsoon winds are important to the land areas of the subcontinent for the rains they bring, to those who traverse the Ocean they have a similar significance and overwhelming influence. In the coastal regions, where these monsoons and the rains are intense in their impact, they govern a variety of activities and influence the growth of structures related to oceanic and seaborne travel.

The monsoon winds, rainfall and oceanic currents determine

in many ways the rhythm and patterns of trade, the location of ports, the flow of rivers and alluvial deposits, the depth and shallowness of the coastal waters and the shape and structure of the coastline. The seasonal inflow and outflow of trade is determined by the direction and intensity of winds that open and close sea-lanes in particular directions. The location of ports is, to some extent, influenced by the shape of the coast, the nature of the coastal waters and currents, the presence or absence of river outlets and estuaries as well as their nature. The size and capacity of these ports are influenced by all these factors. Taking a long range view it is possible to trace the rise and fall of ports along the two coasts of India in co-relation with the climatic and physiognomic changes that have imperceptibly been at work.

The monsoon regime divides itself into two parts, with one half of the year dominated by the south-west monsoon and the other half by the north-east monsoon. These monsoons are almost predictable in the periods of their beginning, intensity and fading. The period when the ocean is subject to the south-west monsoon winds is from May to September, with June, July and August being the months when the winds blow with great intensity. The onset of the monsoon is earliest in the regions just north of the equator, blowing south-westerly across Sri Lanka around 20 May, spreading gradually northwards; in the first two weeks of June it touches the southern fringes of Malabar and continues northwards to the Cutch area, where the onset is about 15 June. By July the whole subcontinent is subject to intense monsoon winds. The winds begin to lose their intensity in September, and the withdrawal of the monsoon southwards across the subcontinent is complete by November.

During the most intense months of the south-west monsoon—June, July and August—the west coast of India is most inhospitable to sailing vessels. No sailing was possible from India westwards, while rapid passage could be made from the Cape of Good Hope towards India, and from west Asia to India. It was, of course, impossible for ships to ride at anchor in most of the west-coast ports, exposed as they were to the full blast of the monsoon in these roadsteads. Hence, Indian sailing vessels sought refuge in ports away from the coast, and smaller vessels took shelter in the few river

estuaries that could admit of small craft. European vessels arranged their sailings in such a way that they arrived on the coast at the end of the monsoon period in September, and left the coast before May to other destinations. The increasingly larger East Indiamen of the Portuguese, English and Dutch, if they stayed on the coast in the monsoon period, had to anchor way out in the sea. Indian craft would avoid all sailing, especially from the exposed Malabar coast, during this period, and the retreat of the monsoon was celebrated with a festival and some ritual that marked the beginning of the next trading season. The monsoon enabled rapid transport from Malabar to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, Muscat being reached in ten to twelve days and Mocha in twenty days. The entire period of the south-west monsoon was open season for sailing vessels of the eastern coast of India. In April when the monsoon began, the winds were rather variable and were steady towards the south and west of the Bay of Bengal. By May the monsoon winds blew in their usual direction of south-west, though somewhat southwards off the coast of Madras. In June and July over the central phase of the monsoon, the south-western winds blew steadily over the greater part of the Bay. In August their strength varied, being much stronger towards the centre of the Bay. In September the winds weakened and there was great variability.

During the months of the northern winter, November to March, there was a change of winds and the north-eastern monsoon swept through much of the northern Indian Ocean. It had a less extensive time-span than the south-western. It began in October with mainly westerlies, turning gradually to north-westerlies. In November the south-west winds had disappeared and north-eastern winds prevailed over the entire Bay. In this month, in the equatorial belt, winds were north-western, known as the 'cross monsoon'. By the beginning of December, winds in the Bay of Bengal had turned north-easterly and easterly, with high winds and torrential rains in all parts of the Bay. October and November were the months when these winds produced cyclones, in the western and north-western parts of the Bay, affecting particularly the Andhra and Orissa coasts. The north-east winds continued into December, but with decreasing force, when the retreat of the monsoon started and the winds

died out in March. In January north-east winds prevailed but towards the head of the Bay they were in a more northerly direction. In February while north-east winds continued through most of the Bay, in the western half they were more easterly. March could be an unsteady month when winds circulated anti-cyclonically throughout the Bay. During the peak of the north-east monsoon (October to December) the eastern coast was closed to all shipping, as were the months June to August on the west coast, even more so. The east coast is even more exposed to the winds and tidal currents from the ocean as there are no features that provide protection from these phenomena. There are thus even less facilities for shipping to use home ports on this side during these months. They generally took refuge in other areas, across the Bay of Bengal on the eastern side, on to the west coast of India or in the ports of Sri Lanka. There was not a single natural harbour on this east coast, the nearest of this description being the Trincomalee Bay, which was away from the trade routes and markets.

Because the intensity of the north-east monsoon lasted for only two to three months, the sailing season in the Bay of Bengal was rather longer than it was in the Arabian Sea. During the entire period of the south-west monsoon the east coast of India was the lee shore and vessels could sail in and out of ports in relative comfort. The roadsteads of the entire coast were calm and easily approachable. During this period vessels made quick passage from west to east and south to north. It was reported in the late eighteenth century that vessels made the journey from Madras to Penang on the Malay coast in eight days during the south-west monsoon. During the height of the north-east monsoon the return passage took no more than twelve days. As the winds varied in the Bay of Bengal, sufficient information had been acquired to sail from one end of the Bay to the other almost round the year. Especially during the period of the weakening of the monsoon winds, it was possible to make passage either way by tacking and trimming, and utilizing changes of winds. When the winds were contrary, it was possible for the vessels to work up and down and take advantage of every change of wind. When sailing across the Bay and north-south and vice versa, vessels utilized the Andaman and Nicobar islands and

the passages through them—in Preparis north and south channels and Achin head—when looking for passageways. These routes were well known to the Cholas and to the Arabs and were traced in Arab sea-charts used by their nachodas for many centuries.

The periods of the change of monsoons produced inclement weather that had to be guarded against. The most dangerous was the early break of the north-east monsoon, which often began with cyclonic storms that hit the Coromandel and Orissa coasts. Climatologists have estimated an average of two per year along this coast. Now and then these were (and are) attended by destructive winds, torrential rains and great loss to life and property in coastal areas. Ships anchored along the coast when such a cyclone struck were blown against the shore and smashed to pieces, to avoid which they had to sail southwards and south-westwards to the Bay of Madura. May, October, and November were the worst months for the Bay of Bengal: in May the early south-west winds could develop into cyclonic storms and move westwards and north-westwards; in October the north-east monsoon broke and could produce the worst cyclones. These cyclones are not a feature of the Arabian Sea, where there may be an occurrence in December or January in the north-western area around Kathiawar and Sind, but not of similar intensity.

The island of Sri Lanka and the extreme southern tip of the subcontinent provided some shelter from each of these monsoons. It was possible for vessels from both coasts of India to take shelter on the leeward side of the island's coast, and the Bay of Trincomalee was large enough to harbour many ships throughout the year. Malabar ships could take shelter from the south-west monsoon in the ports to the east of Tuticorin. Likewise, Coromandel ships could sail south-westwards into Madura Bay to escape the north-east monsoon. In general, the two monsoon regimes hindered the growth of home-ports of any substantial size to house fleets, and promoted a nomadic existence for Indian shipping on both sides of the coast. A sensible arrangement by which fleets could shift from one coast to the other at the appropriate season was not possible because of political divisions. To some extent, the monsoons and the nature of the ports also, determined the character of

shipping. The continuing adherence to sewn boats, though the use of iron nails was known and prevalent from the sixteenth century, is partly attributable to the necessity of beaching vessels, as well as of withstanding the constant buffeting of surf while at anchor.

The existence of a different wind system in the tropical belt as well as to the south of the equator was known and utilized in long-distance sailings between West Asia and South East Asia. The monsoons were effective from the equator to Tropic of Cancer; to the south of the equator and north of 28°S, south-east trade winds blew throughout the year, and further to the south were the westerlies. The Europeans, coming round the Cape, used these winds systematically, particularly the Dutch whose main fleet sailed direct to Batavia and Java by making use of the southern passage and the westerlies. For passage within Asia, this wind system was utilized by vessels sailing from Java and the archipelago islands to India, and even those sailing from Bengal to Bombay or the Red Sea during contrary winds.

The Europeans, after three centuries of experience of sailing in the Indian Ocean, had developed a thorough knowledge of the wind systems of the Ocean. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the English brought this knowledge together into the *Bay of Bengal Pilot* and the *Western Indian Ocean Pilot*, published by the Hydrography Office and then periodically updated. The English and Dutch companies, which made frequent voyages from one end of the Indian Ocean to the other, had drawn up firm schedules for their vessels sailing from their various Indian factories and ports. It is not known how much of this knowledge was shared by Indians. Clearly, the Indians had themselves accumulated a store of knowledge from their own traditional activities and from Arab accounts with which they were familiar. Arab accounts show borrowings from early Indian traditions, such as those of the Cholas. The Portuguese were very beholden to this Indian knowledge, right from the first voyage of Vasco da Gama who was piloted by Abdul bin Majid, presumably a Gujarati Muslim, from Mombasa to Calicut in 1498. Indian merchants had developed their own schedules for the major routes from Surat and Malabar to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and to Malacca, Acheh and into the

archipelago, from Coromandel and Bengal to Syriam, Malacca, Acheh and the archipelago, from Surat to Bengal and back—all popular routes of Indian trade for centuries.

Rivers

The system of rivers flowing across the coast into the ocean on the eastern and western sides was considerably influenced by these monsoons, and in turn influenced the location of ports and points of entry and exit. Apart from the Ganges, Indus and Godavari, very few rivers have a perennial flow of such width and depth as to sustain river-borne transport of any magnitude. The Ganges and Indus are such complex systems and comprise such frequent changes of course and of the streams that feed them, that important changes have been recorded even in one lifetime. The rivers in the west are generally short and not very broad. From the north, after the Indus and its tributaries disgorge themselves in the delta, come the rivers Tapti, Sharavati, and (in the Malabar coast) a number of shorter rivers which have their origins in the Western Ghats. In the east the major rivers are the Kaveri, Palar, Krishna, Godavari and Mahanadi, before we come to the Ganges and its many tributaries.

Because of the seasonal flooding of the monsoons and the sudden spate of water rushing through in a short space of time, the rivers, both of the east and the west, bring vast amounts of alluvial deposit. There is a great deal of silting of banks and much soil is deposited into the ocean, at which point are found sand-bars or sandbanks where the water is very shallow. Sometimes these completely block the entrance to the rivers. Tidal flows build up these sandbanks, but sometimes also caused these bars to be broken through to create passage. Most of the rivers thus have shallow estuaries, obstructing the entry of vessels of any size. In the few cases where a breach was made, the water was deep enough to carry vessels of some size, upto 200 or so tonnes. These rivers were able to emerge as important waterways and become the hub of commercial traffic to the hinterland. Even where this happened, very few of the rivers, with the exception of the Ganges, enabled sailing into the interior for any distance. Such rivers were the Godavari,

Tapti and Sharavati, but the distance so traversed in the proper season would only be up to about thirty kilometres. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many rivers were observed to have become shallower, the distances travelled upstream getting shorter with every season.

It was of course possible to travel some considerable distance in flat-bottomed barges, row-vessels and punts, and considerable traffic was carried on in this way. Goods were distributed upstream and brought downstream, and in many cases market towns developed within about fifteen to thirty kilometres up these rivers. Even where the estuary was shallow and did not admit cargo vessels, the rivers were used as repair stations and dockyards developed inside them. The ships would be sailed in at high tide, having been emptied of cargo. In this way the ships were kept secure during off-season and the necessary repairs carried out. A number of these rivers became shipbuilding and repair yards. The most noteworthy among these were in the Tapti river at Surat, in the Cochin river, and in one of the tributaries of the Godavari. The Ganges was, of course, exceptional in facilitating travel upto over 500 kilometres from its delta.

The sand-bars and shoals at the estuaries kept shifting. There is evidence of attempts by the state to attend to this problem and take steps to keep the estuaries open. It was also not possible to anchor near the estuary of rivers because of the shallowness and flow of water. Thus, though the port and town complex were situated in or near the river's mouth, the large ocean-going ships had often to anchor five to seven kilometres away, in suitably firm ground. This was another disadvantage in the development of a port-town complex at river mouths where inland and oceanic transport could meet. This was seen to be a serious handicap to the growth of a port like Surat, as will be discussed later.

An interesting characteristic of inland water transport is observed in Malabar, where rivers were linked to an inland water system of lagoons running almost parallel to the coast for many miles, linking areas which produced trade commodities. These backwaters are entered through the Periyar river, near whose estuary Cochin was located, and extended for about 120 kilometres from

Allepey, fifty kilometres south of Cochin, upto Ponnani, about eight kilometres to the north. There are various points at which an entry and exit could be made. As these backwaters covered some of the best pepper-producing country of Malabar, they provided access and cheap transport to these places and were a vital asset in the commercial viability of Malabar. Malabar *prahus* which plied these waters were safe from the ravages of whoever controlled the open seas and gave these little traders a flexibility of operation during the days of high commercial politics.

Another natural characteristic favoured the commerce of Malabar. From Allepey to the port of Cranganore there was a layer of mud that was formed out in the sea, parallel to the coast, as a result of the strong outflow of water. This eroded soil from the Ghats to the ocean. The accumulation of this over centuries had resulted in this mudbank being formed, which could not be broken by south-western winds and currents. This mudbank cut the gathering surf and acted as a protective wall, beneath which the water was extremely calm even at the height of the south-west monsoon. This provided safe anchoring ground in deep water for vessels all the year round, the water being smooth. The bank was strengthened by the June rains. It was not continuous and does not exist at the entrance to Cochin, but the vessels of Cochin can use the safety of the mudbank a few miles to the north or the south.

The Ganges and the Indus were the exceptional rivers, providing the only riverine navigation systems comparable to the great rivers of the world. Of these, in our period the Indus virtually lost its advantage owing to major shifts in its course and discharge into the ocean. The Ganges remained an important navigation system. It also underwent many changes in historic times. In our period it continued to provide access into the interior through major navigation channels that remained open. Just prior to the seventeenth century, a shift in course of one of the tributaries of the delta, the Sarasvathi, had resulted in the decline of the port of Satgaon, for long the most important port of Bengal. Situated on a loop before this rivulet fell into the Ganges, it provided safe anchorage for ocean-going ships. When the river Hughli opened up a deep water channel in its exit into the ocean and the Sarasvathi silted up, the

Hughli became the major navigation route, and around 1579 the port of Hughli was founded on its right bank. The Ganges delta shares the characteristic of other Indian estuaries in disgorging a great deal of alluvial soil during monsoon floods. Some bars formed on the shores of the delta, and there were ever-shifting shoals. But the water about these shoals was deep enough to admit of large vessels at all times. In the course of the seventeenth century the changes in the Ganges delta continued and navigation up the Hughli became progressively difficult. The deep water channel through which ships sailed the 200 kilometres to the port of Hughli was changing, and ships had to be piloted up by specialist pilots who knew the behaviour of the river. A constant danger was the 'freshes' that kept pouring down in spurts from the upper catchment areas and which would sweep ships off course. Pilots who knew the river were aware of calm waters, in which they could guide the ships and thereby stay out of the rush of these 'freshes'. Each of the European companies, in time, had a number of Ganges pilots who would board the ships off Palmyrah Point and take control.

The Indus seems to have undergone some major change in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It seems to have been affected by the prograding of the Sind and Kathiawar coasts and, while outflows of the Indus had previously been to the east of the delta, this part was becoming silted up. The bar, which at one time appeared to have admitted large ships, was unable to do so now. The port of Lahiri Bandar, which had been the major port at the chief outlet of the Indus, seems to have lost its importance. Similarly, while access to the inland administrative city of Tatta twelve kilometres up river had been easy, this was no longer the case. After a period of experimenting with various ports in the delta, the attempts were given up and, by the end of the seventeenth century, the Indus delta was not directly linked to the ocean trade routes.

Ports

A number of factors combined to determine the rise and fall of ports on the Indian coastline. There was no instance of a favourable

conjunction of all or many of these factors which resulted in the development of a major port. As noted above, the geomorphology of the Indian coastline was such that there was no harbour favoured by nature as an all-weather haven for ships. The two ports that may be said to be blessed with favourable natural features were taken early by the European powers. Goa was a capacious island twenty kilometres long and ten kilometres broad, protecting a river harbour that was able to receive large ships. For safe anchorage during the height of the monsoons, though, ships had to go the Marmagoa, six or eight kilometres away. Bombay evolved gradually out of the reclamation and joining of a number of islands. After this extensive reclamation it provided an excellent deep-water harbour. The only natural harbour in this whole region was Trincomalee Bay, with ample deep-water anchorage for several vessels at a time right round the year.

By the very nature of the coastline, thus, several of the ports were open roadstead ports. In some, such as Cochin and Masulipatnam, anchorage was possible reasonably close to the harbour, but in most other's ships anchored over eight kilometres out, and loading and unloading had to be done by boats of diverse nature based in and around the port. This meant, of course, that these ports were not open during the height of the monsoons, June to August on the west coast, and October to December on the east. This was an important feature that hindered the growth and development of many Indian ports. Not only did they suffer a loss of revenue and activity during that off-season period, it meant that the port could not become the home of a fleet of ships that could be domiciled and anchored there throughout the year. The fleet had to look for a safe haven in some other part of the coast, and, given the nature of the monsoon season, this was not possible in close proximity. Or else it had to arrange to sit out this off-season in some other distant area where it had ventured for trade. This arrangement had, however, the advantage of providing security against attack from the sea. Hostile ships could not come too close to the shore to be able to direct firepower effectively on the port, or launch a surprise attack. When European powers sought to engage in hostile action against Indian states, they were never able to attack the ports

directly. When they did so, as in the case of the Portuguese attack on Calicut in 1498, they were ineffective. As a result the ports did not construct shore batteries as part of their defence works.

As we have seen, most ports were situated at the estuary of a river, or within a few miles of such an estuary. In such cases the large ocean-going vessels were anchored in the open roadstead as, generally, the river mouths had sand-bars which were too shallow for ships to approach the shore. There was no situation on either coast where the estuary allowed access to vessels of any size so that the harbour could be located inside the river. At best there were a few cases where the entry had high water in spring tide and allowed vessels of medium capacity. Generally speaking, large vessels anchored outside and loaded and unloaded through smaller river boats. In such cases, the goods were brought to loading bays within the river where the major port structures were located. These included warehouses, customs posts, and offices of port officials. In such cases, there were not too many structures on the seafront, sometimes hardly any, as all the administration was done in the port-town inside the river. In an exceptional case like Surat, the port-town was twenty-two kilometres up the river. The most favourable location of the estuary ports was Goa, where the broad and deep estuary of the Mandovi river provided excellent shelter for a number of large ships. Many of the rivers, once one crossed the estuary and went in, became deeper for several kilometres inland, thus providing interior access for river boats and barges.

Another favourable feature for a port was the presence of a bay, or of headlands that provided shelter from currents and the surf, and which was deep enough for large vessels to anchor close to the shore. There were not too many of these bays on either coast of India, and the few that existed were not deep or capacious. This was an advantage in Goa, for the Agoada Bay provided good anchorage for large ocean-going vessels. The Malabar port of Cannanore was situated on a bay, but this was not deep enough for ocean-going vessels. The Coromandel port of Porto Novo was situated on Killai Bay, in which medium-sized vessels could anchor. On the Andhra coast there was Kakinada, located on a bay which made it the safest natural harbour on the east coast.

In the absence of obvious physical advantages that particular ports enjoyed, the major characteristics which determined the fortunes of ports were their location in relation to producing and consuming areas, as well as in relation to land and sea trade routes. These factors also determined the functions of ports and the nature of their infrastructures. There was also a further consideration, namely the nature of the state in which they were located and the functions they performed for that state. Most of the states of the subcontinent were large and inland, with primary military and revenue concerns in the vast agricultural tracts of the interior. The littoral was somewhat remote from their attention, and ports tended to be self-contained territorial entities administered by appointees with little direct control from the centre.

The exception to this were the ports of Malabar, which were rather more like the port-states of inland South East Asia than the territorial kingdoms of the subcontinent. Calicut and Cochin were the outstanding examples of this type, but there were other lesser ports ruled by subordinate rajahs or chieftains. In these states, the port was the capital of the kingdom and often the ruler had a residence in the port or a palace in close proximity. The palace of the Samudiri (Zamorin) of Calicut was outside the port-town, but he had a residence within it which he occupied during the trading season. Here he had his audience halls where he received merchants and foreign emissaries. The Rajah of Cochin had his palace in the port-town, which was separate from the European port and town after its domination by the Portuguese. These ports were thus the administrative and political centres, besides being commercial centres and marketplaces. This Malabar tradition was carried on even in Kanara where, in the kingdom of Ikkeri, the state had a tight control over the port of Honavar.

The prime determinant for the importance, size and longevity of a port appears to have been its function as a major outlet for a large and productive hinterland. The major ports of the period surveyed fall into this category. The Gujarat ports of the north-western coast, just south of the Gulf of Cambay, are the best example of this. Here two ports—Cambay and Surat—had together a long ascendancy over India's overseas trade of about four cen-

turies. They served a hinterland of widening concentric circles of productive capacity, in a variety of goods. There was the immediate hinterland of Gujarat with its textile production base. This gave the ports a firm base on which to grow, the centres being within a radius of 250 kilometres of these ports, with good communication into these places. As the ports and the trade expanded, the hinterland also broadened very extensively to include the Gangetic plains to the north-east and the agricultural and handicraft producing areas upto Benares. It also extended northwards and north-westwards to the Indus valley, and served to redirect trade which had customarily gone overland through Multan and the Khyber Pass. This ensured for these ports a long period of continuous trade, shifting from one to the other only under the compulsion of geological changes to the coastline and the waterfront.

Another port which grew and developed under the influence of a wide hinterland was Masulipatnam. It did not have particularly favourable natural characteristics, but its good land communication with the heart of the Sultanate of Golconda (after the expansion and consolidation of that kingdom) gave this port an edge over its neighbours. Similar causes favoured the growth of the Hughli at the mouth of the Ganges. At the time that Bengal was unified and pacified by the Mughals, this port drew on a large hinterland and became an important exit port for Bengal's produce.

This port–hinterland connection can be illustrated as operating on a small scale in a number of other ports. The port of Sadraspatnam drew on a hinterland of weaving and indigo culture. The ports of Porto Novo and Cuddalore served the Palar valley and, through land routes, had access into the Salem and Coimbatore districts. The port of Nagapatnam was the chief outlet port for the Tanjore kingdom and the Kaveri delta.

Conversely, when the hinterland shrank by conquest or by political unrest, the port lost its importance, sometimes dramatically. The two best examples of this are Surat and Masulipatnam. Surat was affected in two stages, first by the shrinking of its outer hinterland in the Gangetic valley and the Indus. At a second stage even its immediate Gujarat hinterland became totally insecure and this destroyed the trade of the port. A similar experience is seen in

Masulipatnam, where a sudden decline took place when the links between the port and the hinterland were cut off. After the Mughal conquest of the kingdom of Golconda, the central Deccan began to look northwards and westwards, and it was those routes which became more popular rather than the eastward roads. In a general way the adverse effects of development in the hinterland or in the ports is seen in a number of places on the coasts of Coromandel and of Kanara and Bijapur.

Another determinant in the development of ports was their place on major trade routes and the entrepôt functions they performed. The classic example in pre-colonial Asian trade of a port without a productive hinterland but situated on major trade routes performing entrepôt functions was Melaka. In India no single port developed purely as an entrepôt port, but there were several which lay on trade routes and performed *some* entrepôt functions. Thus, Cambay and later Surat were both ports serving a hinterland as well as being situated on major trade routes and performing entrepôt functions. They were both transit and redistribution points for South East Asian spices and Malabar pepper. Later in the seventeenth century, Surat performed a similar function for Bengal goods. Masulipatnam performed some entrepôt functions for Surat and West Asian goods and for South East Asian spices, as well as in a limited way, for Bengal and Burmese goods. Calicut was another port which performed both functions, of serving the hinterland as well as being a meeting place for trade routes. Its entrepôt role declined in the seventeenth century, with the rise of European trading powers in its neighbourhood. In general, the rise of the large European companies in Asian trade curtailed the role of Asian ports as redistribution points and entrepôts.

Ports in India did not develop centralizing, centripetal tendencies, drawing towards themselves the activities of other smaller ports up and down the coastline. The remarkable feature of the Indian scene is the existence of a number of ports of reasonable activity within close proximity to each other. It was not till the colonial period that some kind of consolidation was achieved through deliberate state policy. Even large ports had their satellite ports, which never really went out of existence. Thus, even a great port

like Surat had a few subsidiary ports within a few kilometres to the north and south, where maritime activity went on. This may have been partly because none of the ports had obvious and overwhelming natural advantages. It could also seem an index of the size of the trade which could be transacted in dispersed small-scale operations. There could also have been a suspicion of centralized control and direction. Whatever the reasons, this dispersal of trade continued into the period of growth in the seventeenth century.

Very few of the ports developed as urban centres or had buildings of any degree of magnificence, in contrast with inland cities built in the Hindu and Islamic styles. European observers of these ports commented on their simple, rather skimpy styles of construction. Surat, of course, was the most urbanized of the ports, and next to it came Masulipatnam. Calicut and Cochin, being royal capitals, had several sprawling buildings, but again not of any magnificence. Both Surat and Masulipatnam had substantial residences which belonged to wealthy merchants and administrative officials. The former had some impressive public buildings, including mosques and a customs house. Some of the Islamic merchant residences were palatial, built in the Islamic style, terraced and multi-storeyed. In these houses the outer view was not impressive, which was probably why foreign visitors were not impressed. Inside, these houses had courtyards, fountains, flower gardens, carpeted floors and reception areas. Doors and windows were latticed and beautifully carved, and tortoise-shell was used for decoration. In neither of these ports in general, did the Hindus build ostentatiously. It is significant that there were no large temples in these ports.

Neither had the port-towns any element of planning in their construction. Their streets were narrow, and their houses seem to have been built haphazardly. There was no spatial separation into wealthy and poorer suburbs, and shanty dwellings were distributed in the middle of spacious houses. This constituted a fire hazard—a major problem in both ports. In Surat and Masulipatnam major fires broke out in the seventeenth century, causing much destruction to property. None of the ports attracted settlements of artisans within their borders. Skilled labour generally came in to work from outer suburbs. The army of port labourers and boatmen required

to work in loading, unloading and in the maintenance of ships was generally settled along the coastal fringe to the north and south of the port, in caste villages, each under their own headmen. Given the fact that ships anchored a few miles off the coast, every port needed a large pool of such labour, generally drawn from seafaring castes of the coast.

The other growing port of this period, Hughli, was also spartan in the nature of its buildings and residences. It originated as an unofficial Portuguese settlement and had a transitory character for the first century of its existence. It was reported that these Portuguese settlers lived in what looked like hovels along the waterfront. It was after the Mughal conquest of the port that some administrative buildings were erected, but for long it retained this shabby character. The Dutch and the English had to construct their own factory buildings, and the Dutch factory was for long the most magnificent structure in this port-town.

It is significant from some of the examples given above that the indigenous inhabitants of a port did not invest in its development, nor even did the state. The Mughals, who put up magnificent structures in their various administrative centres, did not do the same for their ports. It was the expatriate population that did so, to some extent. In Surat and Masulipatnam it was the Persian and Bohra merchants who exhibited wealth in the form of ostentatious residences. Likewise in Porto Novo and Cuddalore, Chulia Muslims set up permanent residences and gradually made these places their homes. Wealthy Hindu merchants generally did not look upon the port as their place of domicile; that privilege was rather for their natal villages or towns in the interior. In fact, it appears that many did not even bring their families to reside in the port, keeping them in their natal family properties. Thus, none of the ports developed a permanent settled population of people of influence and wealth who looked upon them as 'home' requiring investment and development. This is seen from the refusal of people to erect and endow temples on the scale they did inland.

With the exception of Surat, none of the ports developed defence constructions of any size of effectiveness. In Surat a castle was constructed on the waterfront abutting the Tapti, making use

of its waters for a moat and ditch, and with walls on three sides. It was provided with parapets, galleries and cannon emplacements, though these were cumbersome to operate. Masulipatnam, on the other hand, was defenceless, except for watchposts at the entrance to the bridge, and the causeway which led to the city. It was only after a few bad experiences, mostly attacks from Europeans, that construction of a mud fort near the bar of the river was begun, which the French strengthened after their conquest of Masulipatnam in 1750. A few other ports, such as those in Malabar, had forts erected at river estuaries. The Marathas engaged in a policy of fort construction on the Konkani coast, but these were away from ports and stood on their own as military installations serving an offensive and defensive capacity. It was only after European settlement along the coast that strong forts were erected along the waterfront to defend the port from attack by sea. In the European ports, much of the activity bordered the seafront, whereas this was not the case in any of the Indian ports.

With the background sketch of the general characteristics of ports and the physical conditions in which seafaring took place, we may now proceed to look at the coastline and the ports of significance that existed at the beginning of our period of study. At the north-west extreme of the subcontinent was the Indus delta, a low flat coast partially flooded at high water for considerable distances inland. The Indus discharged into the sea through several outlets which were constantly changing and advancing seaward. There was always a major port at the main Indus outlet. In the sixteenth century, and at the beginning of the seventeenth, this port was Lahiri Bandar, a place of considerable trade westwards and southwards along the coast. It must have taken over the trade of Daybhal or Dewal, probably on a western branch of the Indus, well-known to Arab geographers in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. The bar at Lahiri Bandar was deep enough to admit vessels of up to 200 tonnes. The port and town were inside the river, which was very deep. Tatta, the district capital, was about twelve kilometres up the river and there was further access to the inland cities of Lahore and Multan through the waterways. Already in the seventeenth century, European observers were noting the appearance of

shoals which obstructed navigation. This was probably why the port declined as a link in the ocean trade routes of the Arabian Sea. In the early seventeenth century the English thought it important enough to negotiate the establishment of a factory there.

South of Sind, the Gulf of Kutch and the Kathiawar peninsula did not contain ports of any description that participated in trade, both because of the hostile physical conditions along the coast and the Gulf and in the hinterland. It is as we approach the Gulf of Cambay and the northernmost parts of the west coast that we come to a dense cluster of ports, from Diu on the south-western tip of the Kathiawar peninsula, to Daman. These ports were Diu, Gogha at the entrance to the Gulf of Cambay, Gandhar and Cambay deep within the Gulf, Broach at the southern entrance to the Gulf inside the Narmada river, and Randar and Surat north and south of the river Tapti and Daman. These ports were on the ascendant at various times, with Cambay enjoying a long period of hegemony from about 1400 to 1550. This was then gradually overtaken by Surat, which maintained its pre-eminence till about 1740. The decline of Cambay was primarily due to geographical causes. The Gulf of Cambay was subject to tectonic movements which moved the town inland, and the Gulf itself was subject to silting in its upper reaches. The tides were strong and rapid, and could be dangerous to large ships anchored there.

As the trade shifted away from Cambay, ships at first used Gandhar but were subject to the same inconveniences. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, and with the Mughal conquest of Surat, the transfer of trade was to that port. For a time the port of Diu, then under Portuguese control, had ambitions of rivalling Surat. It was an offshore island, and the port was on the east end of the island, with deep calm waters for a number of ships to anchor. It could not, however, become a serious rival to Surat, which had overwhelming advantages. As a port and city, about twenty-two kilometres inside the river, Surat had many inconvenient features. The river Tapti disgorged a great deal of silt; its mouth was full of shoals and sandbanks. The large ships anchored about six kilometres south-west of the port, or at another spot called Suvaly about eight kilometres to the north. Here there was a deep and calm anchoring

place, protected on one side by a sand-bar where loading and unloading could take place with safety. Broach, inside the Narmada river, was also at one time a port of some traffic, but the changes in the Gulf of Cambay that affected the port of Cambay affected this port as well.

This group of Cambay and Gujarati ports was also the home of a busy shipbuilding industry. The presence of so many rivers of considerable depth made it convenient to construct dockyards inside these rivers to build and repair ships. Shipbuilding timber was abundant in the interior hills, and the rivers provided transport facilities. On the Tapti river just next to Surat's castle was a dockyard where ships were being built all the time. Other ports on rivers and creeks developed similar facilities. In the seventeenth century, besides an expanding programme of shipbuilding for local interests, Europeans were having ships built in these Gujarat ports.

South of this cluster of ports, the coast becomes rocky and strewn with islands. The coastal plain is narrow in width, reducing from about 110 kilometres as one goes southwards. The three ports along this coast, Daman, Bassein and Chaul, had been taken by the Portuguese in the course of the sixteenth century. They were all open roadstead ports, but Bassein had a river of some depth which accommodated a substantial shipbuilding industry. Chaul had an Indian town outside the Portuguese fort from which Indian ships, equipped with Portuguese cartazes, sailed into the ocean. The Portuguese seized and fortified these ports in actions against Gujarat, Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, and were well entrenched in them before the Mughal expansion into these states. These ports carried on at all times a moderate amount of trade—as compared to those to the north and to the south—primarily because their hinterlands were not conspicuous in the production of any exportable commodities.

Bombay, which lay between Bassein and Chaul, consisted of a number of offshore islands which were made into a port only by extensive reclamation and drainage work by the English after they acquired it from the Portuguese. When these works were complete, it became an excellent deep-water harbour with extensive facilities for shipbuilding and repairing. In our period it was not suitably

located for the kind of trade that was being carried on. Its hinterland was not productive nor able to attract imports of any magnitude. The growth of Bombay is very closely linked to the growth of the English East India Company and its trading system in Asia. Some of the islands were used by Maratha naval chieftains to harass coastal shipping, and by pirates of the area.

As one proceeds southwards, approaching the Konkan coast, activity on the coast begins to quicken and ports of more substantial trade appear. Dabhul was by all accounts an important port of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was situated on the estuary of the Vashishti river, which was deep enough for vessels of medium size to sail upto about thirty kilometres from the entrance. About twenty-two kilometres up the river was the market town of Karbone. Dabhul seems to have been the home of an ocean-going shipping fleet sailing long-distances to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, and to South East Asia. After the Portuguese secured domination of shipping of this north-western Indian coast, Dabhul ships operated with Portuguese cartazes and featured strongly in the trade to Ormuz. Later, when the Dutch appeared on the scene, they sometimes freighted goods to Dabhul from Bandar Abbas, showing that significant trade was still carried on by merchants of Dabhul. South of Dabhul was the port of Vengurla, an open roadstead port which had some links with long-distance trade to the west. It had a good hinterland where goods could be sold and was known as a fine provisioning place. The Dutch fleet, during its regular blockade of Goa in the first decades of the seventeenth century, used to provision here. Later the Dutch thought it important enough to open a factory and build a substantial residence.

Goa had been a place of substantial trade and augmented its position after the Portuguese conquest. It occupied a magnificent site on the island of Tissuary which protected a river harbour capable of receiving very large ships. To the north was the Mandovi river, to the south the shallow Zuari river. The island was separated from the mainland by a narrow creek flowing from one river to the other. The river had a bar at the entrance and had to be approached cautiously. A safe anchorage for large vessels was at Marmagoa to the south, where ships were protected from the south-west mon-

soon. Goa was situated at the mid-point of the coast between Gujarat and Malabar and was in a position to link these two areas. It served a deep hinterland provided by the Vijayanagar empire and the sultanate of Bijapur. The Portuguese built on these foundations and made it grow rapidly into an important port of western India.

South of Goa are three ports, Karwar, Honavar and Bhatkal, all important in the trade of the region. They served a thriving hinterland ruled first by the Vijayanagar empire and then by Bijapur. The ports were located in coastal Kanarese chieftaincies, owing allegiance to the paramount power in the hinterland. Karwar was situated in a bay with deep water, at the bottom of which was a river said to be capable of receiving vessels of upto 300 tonnes. There was a fort on the north side of the entrance to the river. The town of Karwar was inside the river at a distance of five kilometres. It was the chief port of Bijapur and later fell into the hands of the Marathas. The port was primarily important for coastal trade northwards and southwards. South of Karwar was Honavar (or Onor), an open roadstead port lying on the north side of the extensive estuary of Sharavati river. The river had a bar which was constantly changing but coastal craft could sail into the river through a channel. It was the principal port of the Nayak of Ikkeri, and its river provided access to the pepper-producing lands. The Portuguese seized control of the port in 1568 and built a fortress at the entrance to the river to control the traffic in pepper. In time, a large Portuguese casado population settled along the river, carrying on a lucrative trade. To the south of Honavar was Bhatkal, also noted for the export of pepper, but not a favourable haven for ships. It is spoken of by Tome Pires as a major port serving Vijayanagar, but later in the sixteenth century it seems to have declined. Further to the south were the ports of Coondopore, with the town of Barcelore (or Basrur) inside the river, and Mangalore, a port and town at the mouth of the Netraveli river. These ports were controlled by petty rajahs owing allegiance to the Nayak of Ikkeri. The Portuguese controlled the trade of these ports by constructing forts below the Hindu town and controlling access to it. In all these places, the river had sand-bars which provided access for small craft which could then sail some miles up the river.

From Mount Eli the Malabar coast begins with somewhat different coastal characteristics, and there is a more dominant maritime ethos in the country. The coastal plains shrink to about fifty kilometres, with the Ghats rising steeply and water rushing down perennial rivers. It is a coast of ancient ports and shifting centres of commerce caused by changes in the coastline. At the foot of the Eli mountain the port of Matayi on the Taliparumba river had been a commercial centre in the medieval period. But the shifting bar at the mouth of the river had denied access to ships, and commerce shifted south to Cannanore. Mount Eli was a convenient landmark for sailors from far out at sea to direct themselves, the only such in the western coast when visibility was poor. The port of Cannanore is situated on a bay deep enough for ships which were able to anchor close to the shore. About eleven kilometres to the north of it is the Valarpatnam river, navigable in all seasons right upto the Ghat foothills. To the south-west of the bay was a rocky promontory which gave shelter from strong winds. Some of the best poon spars for ships' masts were brought down the river and provisions and fresh water were abundant. The Portuguese had built a fort here, early in the sixteenth century, but they never controlled or appropriated any substantial share of the trade of this port and kingdom. Tellichery, to the south of Cannanore, also attracted some of the trade of the Matayi and the Eli kingdoms. It was an open roadstead port in which the English established one of their early Malabar factories. These ports, together with another called Mittangal, were the home of the powerful Mapillah merchants, and armed sailors and are referred to in Portuguese literature as the corsair ports.

To the south of these ports was the kingdom and port of Calicut, some of whose characteristics have already been noted. Calicut and Ponnani, another port to the south, were major centres of coastal and oceanic trade. The port of Calicut lay near the entrance to the Kallayi river on the north side. The mud bank characteristic of the southern Malabar coast provided a sheltered landing place about five kilometres to the north of the port. Calicut itself is quite exposed, with strong surf during the monsoon, and ships sheltered in the mouths of neighbouring rivers or in the creeks of the satellite

ports of Kapatt, Pantalayini and Puthupatnam. The city sprawled over about six kilometres, with no constructions of any magnitude. The samudiri's palace and the houses of the wealthy Nairs and merchants were scattered around suburbs in the middle of lush gardens and coconut groves. It was a cosmopolitan city, predominantly Hindu, with several temples but also with many Muslims who had constructed mosques for their worship. The kingdom had expanded over the years, annexing pepper, coconut, and the rice-producing country in the interior and along the coast. The Beypur river, about twelve kilometres south of Calicut, flowed through excellent teak forests and it was convenient to ship this timber to the coast for shipbuilding. The town of Chuliyam on the south side of the river entrance was a good landing place and shelter for vessels. Further to the south was the Ponnani river, with the port and town of Ponnani situated at the entrance. This river also had access to the teak from the Anamalai forests and shipbuilding facilities.

The kingdom of Cochin, bordering on Calicut, extended from Cranganore in the north to Porcad in the south. Cranganore was a small port, twenty-two kilometres north of Cochin, lying on the northern side and four kilometres within the mouth of Paliport river. Between Cranganore and Cochin is a mud bank providing smooth anchoring for vessels in calm water during the monsoon months. It was a convenience for ships of Cochin during this period. The city of Cochin was situated on the southern side of the entrance to a river. The entrance to the river was blocked by a sand spit, but possessed a channel providing access to small vessels. Once inside, the river broadened and deepened and enabled sailing for many kilometres inland, as well as to the network of backwaters and creeks. The old Indian town of the raja was situated six kilometres up the river. It was typical of port towns of this period. Nearer the sea, at the entrance to the river, the Portuguese built their fort and a town developed around it. This was by all accounts an impressive town with several churches, public buildings and large private residences. It was strategically located to control all access to the old town where the king resided. The territories of Cochin, besides being rich in pepper, spices and coconut, also produced excellent

timber which fostered a shipbuilding industry in the rivers of the kingdom. The entrenchment of the Portuguese there from 1502 led to the rapid rise of Cochin from a position secondary to that of Calicut on the Malabar coast to its equal, if not superior, in trade and maritime activity.

To the south of Cochin the coast was controlled by the Raja of Travancore whose principal seaport was Allepey. This port provided a safe roadstead all year round because of the presence of a soft mud bank. Inshore from Allepey was a long lagoon running north to south, parallel to the coast, communicating between Quilon to the south and Ponnani to the north. South of Allepey is the port of Quilon, open to the winds and heavy surf, not protected by the mud banks which end to the north. The presence of a reef and submerged rocks make it unsafe for ships to approach the coast, a feature which continues southward along this coast, which bends south-eastwards to the southern tip of the subcontinent. Quilon was controlled by a subsidiary raja with disputed allegiance to Cochin and Travancore. These lands produced an abundant crop of pepper and merchants from the northern parts were always keen to have access to these markets. This part of the coast up the Cape Comorin is quite dangerous to shipping. Heavy surf prevents the loading of ships' boats, and the locals use only catamarans. It is not surprising that traditionally and in the modern period no ports of any size developed here.

The coast from the tip of Cape Comorin to Point Calimere tended north-eastwards and was sheltered by the island of Sri Lanka, between which and the mainland were a number of islets and channels of varying depths. Parts of this coast provide shelter from the two monsoons, but it was generally a low and sandy coast with innumerable shoals and sand-bars, so large vessels had to stay considerably clear of the coast. The land in this part of the coast was invading the sea. The ancient port of Kayal which had been a deep-water port in the first millennium AD now lay buried in sand three kilometres inland. There were many ports of small size engaged mainly in coastal trade, sailing both westwards to Malabar and eastwards to Coromandel. Much of the shipping was directed towards Sri Lankan ports. Tuticorin grew as the major port to the

west of the Palk Straits after its conquest and fortification by the Portuguese, and then by the Dutch. The port had to be approached cautiously as there were several low islands and sandbanks opposite the port. It was a safe haven during the south-west monsoon, and the north-east monsoon did not fall too heavily on the roads of this port. The other ports on this stretch of coastline were Manapar, Kilkarai, Ponnakayal, west of the Pamban Channel, and Pondy and Adirampatnam east of the Channel.

Crossing between India and Sri Lanka could be done by any one of three waterways. The most favourable was the Pamban Channel between the offshore island of Ramesvaram and the Indian mainland. This was a deep channel which could accommodate large ocean-going vessels. This channel was controlled by the Thevar of Ramnad who had a security post and customs house on the western corner of the island. In our period, it is doubtful if ships from either coast of India used it as a main crossing. It must mostly have been used by ships of Madura, Malabar or Tanjore to cross to the opposite coast. Another crossing, deep enough for substantial vessels, was the strait between Mannar Island and the mainland of Sri Lanka. This crossing was controlled by the power dominant in Sri Lanka which, in the seventeenth century, was first the Portuguese then the Dutch. A third route was through the shallow waters of Adam's Bridge. These waters were littered with submerged and visible islets, rocks, shoals and sand-bars, and only locals proficient in the depth of particular channels would risk the crossing. It was used by the small boat traffic of the coasts of India and Sri Lanka.

Ports on the eastern side of the channel had more brisk traffic, linked as they were to the major trade systems of Coromandel serving the rich hinterlands of the Tanjore kingdom. Thus, Adirampatnam was a substantial port with a hinterland of rice and textile-producing villages. Besides, it had the advantage of providing shelter from the fierce gales of the north-east monsoon that fell directly to the north and east of the port. The bend of the coast at Point Calimere provided shelter from these winds, and shipping of the south Coromandel coast took advantage of this during the height of the monsoon. Shipping from this coast between Malabar and Coromandel also used Sri Lankan ports as protection from the two

monsoons. The ports of the south and west of the island were not subject to the northern monsoon and were safe during these months. During the south-west monsoon, ships could shelter in the northern ports, which were then on the lee shore.

While most of the Sri Lankan ports were mainly utilized by regional shipping of the southern Indian coasts, there were some ports that were convenient on the major long-distance routes. The northern ports of Point Pedro and Kayts were convenient ports of call for the Bengal and north Coromandel ships on their voyage southwards and westwards. Kayts had a deep-water port, with ships anchoring close to the shore, and was convenient for loading elephants, a feature of the India–Sri Lankan trade. Among the southern ports, Colombo and Galle had been used for long-distance trade for centuries, and Arabs had resorted there in numbers before the arrival of the Portuguese. Galle was a good half-way stop-over point for Bengal ships sailing to the Maldives, Malabar and Surat. They were both open roadstead ports, but both had headlands which provided safe anchorage, though they were unsafe during the height of the south-west monsoon. Galle had a bay in which ships could anchor in safety to load and unload, though the approach to this was threatened with submerged rocks and pilots were necessary to guide ships through safe channels. Both these ports were under European control in the seventeenth century. The only natural harbour of this part of the ocean, Trincomalee Bay, has been referred to above. It was not of commercial use during this period, except for a small port at the bottom of the Bay, Kottiyar, which was an outlet for the weak and powerless kingdom of Kandy, mainly through small boat traffic. It was only with European naval rivalries emerging more prominently in these waters, and the ascendence of strategic over commercial considerations, that Trincomalee received greater attention.

At Point Calimere began the Coromandel coast proper which proceeded northerly and slightly north-easterly until the Krishna–Godavari delta. This coast is subject to much less rainfall than the west coast, concentrated in a few months of the year. The coastal plains are broader, the rivers slower and seasonal in their flow, and the vegetation on the coast is sparse and uneven. Nagapatnam is

the first major port from the south, an ancient port which had served as an outlet for the kingdom of Tanjore. It was an open roadstead port at the estuary of one of the outlets of the Kadaivayar river, which formed a bar that was constantly shifting. The surf was high and broke heavily on the bar, forcing large ships to anchor well out into the sea. The port was inaccessible during the height of the north-east monsoon. The river was shallow and admitted of no shipping except very small boats. The Portuguese took control of the port and built a fort there, from which they taxed shipping and trade. The Dutch took it over from them in 1658.

About five kilometres north of Nagapatnam was the port of Nagore, situated at the mouth of the main outlet of the Kadaivayar river. The bar on this river had more water on it than that at Nagapatnam, admitting vessels of large size at high tide. It was the home of a large shipping fleet and the centre of an active coastal and ocean trade to South East Asia, taking over much of the trade previously carried on at Nagapatnam. North of Nagore was Karikal, which had been a major port of the Tamil country in the first centuries of the Christian era but had declined considerably thereafter. It was situated in a country where the Kaveri river broke out into several outlets before flowing into the sea. Karikal is on the north bank of Arasalar river. At high water the river was navigable in small vessels. North of Karikal was Tranquebar, on the left bank of a small river which was barred. It was also an open roadstead port and was ceded to the Danish East India Company by the king of Tanjore in 1619. The coast in this stretch was the delta of two river estuaries, the Coleroon and the Kaveri, which broke up here into innumerable streams flowing into the sea. The coast was flat and low, tidal for miles inland, and interior villages were thickly populated as well as very productive.

North of this coast were the two ports of Porto Novo and Cuddalore, within twenty-five kilometres of each other. Porto Novo is seen as a major port of trade in our period, though its beginnings are obscure. An unofficial Portuguese settlement grew there in the beginning of the seventeenth century, giving it its name; this also gave it the Tamil name of Parangi Peddai and was later known as Muhamad Bandar. It had some favourable natural characteristics

as a port. It was reputed to be smooth and safe for approaches and landing. A backwater called the Killai Bay, with an approach channel from the sea, gave shelter to ships and enabled shipbuilding and repairs to be carried out. Cuddalore was not so favourably endowed. It was on the estuary of the Gudilam river, with a bar which was filling up in our period. Once inside, the river was deep and allowed access to boats some distance upstream. There was another port, Devanampatnam, three kilometres north of Cuddalore, where also ships used to land. All these ports had a very productive hinterland as well as good inland communications by water and by land.

North of Cuddalore was the port Sadurangapatnam, known to the Europeans as Sadras. It was an open roadstead port, without the convenience of a river, but an outstretched headland provided some protection for ships which could anchor close to the coast. It had the advantage of a well-populated hinterland of agricultural and weaving villages, and good road communications well into the interior. Here the coast for some miles was monotonous and unspectacular; no large rivers flowed through to the sea, nor were there favourable features for the reception of ships. It was in this type of coast that, largely by accidental circumstances, three European nations established themselves and built up port-settlements. Two of these—Paleacat and San Thome (Mylapore)—were in places which already functioned as ports of trade in the sixteenth century. But they had declined in their importance, which was why the hinterland rulers invited European powers to settle there and develop trade. All three (including Madras) were open roadstead ports subject to a great groundswell which tended to cast a vessel in-shore. Ships had to anchor six to eight kilometres away from the shore, loading and unloading dangerously in local boats that braved the high surf. During the height of the north-east monsoon, mid-October to mid-December, the ships had to anchor even further out and be ready to proceed out to sea. All three ports were fortified by the Europeans, and a busy township grew outside the walls of the fort. Paleacat had a lagoon in backwaters behind the port, but with no access as there was a sand spit along the coast which filled up only at high tide. The Paleacat anchorage was somewhat better

than at Madras because of the existence of a reef giving some protection from the surf.

Between Paleacat and Masulipatnam were a few roadsteads used as ports, but none of any great significance. In the hinterland of Nellore and approaching the Krishna river were weaving villages whose produce was exported from these ports. Thus there were Arumugam, Kristnapatnam, situated on the left bank of the Vupatheru river and, most important of them, Petapuli or Nizampatnam. This had a river providing entry for vessels upto hundred tonnes, and had considerable coastal and some oceanic trade. Masulipatnam, some of whose features have been noted before, was the prime port of eastern India in our period. It was an open roadstead port but had good firm anchoring ground within three to five kilometres from the shore, with a promontory which reduced the surf for boats approaching the ship. It was barred with sandbanks and shoals. During high tide small boats could enter the river. The town was about a mile inside the river, which deepened inland and gave access to the interior. The town grew in the seventeenth century in haphazard fashion, with sprawling public and private constructions to reflect its growth. It had good road communications into the Deccan and towards the north.

North of Masulipatnam was the Godavari delta, a coastline with characteristic deltaic features and maritime activity which took advantage of these features. The Godavari delta consists of rich low-lying alluvial plains, made fertile by the annual flooding of the river through its various exits into the sea. The west branch of the river, the Vasishta Godavari, is able to admit substantial vessels even at low tide and inside is very deep upto several miles. About ten kilometres from the river mouth is the port and town of Narsapur, and adjoining it Madapollam. Both these places were suitable locations for a flourishing shipbuilding and repair industry. First Madapollam and then Narsapur lost their advantage when the river changed its course towards to end of the seventeenth century. At the northern part of the delta was Coringa Bay, in which a number of minor ports were used at different times. Some of these were located on different branches of the Godavari river, approachable in small boats and country vessels some kilometres into the interior.

Further to the north was the port of Visakhapatnam, not yet of any importance in overseas trade. It lay on a river, with a bar at the entrance, but was capable of admitting boats and small vessels. It was also suitable for the construction of dockyards, for which it later became famous. This activity was fostered by the existence in the Godavari uplands of good timber suitable for shipbuilding, and of river-transport facilities. To the north of this port were Kalingapatnam, Bimilipatnam and the inland town of Srikakulam, which had a port outlet with shallow barred rivers providing some access to the interior. They were all open roadstead ports, but Bimilipatnam had the advantage of being protected by headlands and provided safe anchorage in both monsoons. These ports served a rich rice-producing hinterland and were important provisioning ports for large vessels. Further to the north was Ganjam, of some importance in oceanic trade in our period, situated at the mouth of the Rushikulya river. The river was blocked by sandbanks which allowed small vessels through, and was navigable some miles inland. The river valley was fertile and the port also drew from the agricultural produce of Orissa.

The Orissa plains, while watered by three rivers which combine to form a fertile delta, is not noted for ports with large-scale commercial activity. The only port in our period is Haraspur at the mouth of the Patali river. To the north, at Palmyrah Point, begins the Bengal coast, and as ships sighted this point they began to prepare for entry into one or the other of the Ganges delta ports. West of the delta are the two ports of Balasore and Pipeli. Balasore is situated at the mouth of the Burhabalang river. It was an open roadstead port subject to cyclonic storms during the north-east monsoon. The river is tidal and was able to carry vessels in up to dry docks, of which there were several inside the river. Vessels of upto 200 tonnes could navigate inland where there were a number of market towns. Balasore town itself lies on the south bank of the river, twenty-five kilometres from the entrance. It was the home of a substantial shipping fleet in our period. North-east of Balasore was the port of Pipely, also situated on the banks of a river. It was also an open roadstead port and the town was about twenty-four

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kilometres up the river. Both these ports grew after the Portuguese were expelled from Hughli in 1632.

In the Ganges delta the most important port of this period was Hughli. It was situated 200 kilometres up the Hughli river, at that time the major outlet of the Ganges into the sea. The difficulties of entry into the river and the problems encountered by ships on this long course have been discussed above. Once inside, it was a deep-water port, most convenient for loading and unloading goods. It had facilities for the assemblage of goods for export from the interior and for the despatch inland of imported goods. For this reason, Europeans preferred to land their goods in Hughli rather than in Balasore and shifted their activities to this port in the second half of the seventeenth century. The other delta port, Satgaon, had declined totally because of the silting up of the Sarasvati. The port of Sripur on the Meghna river, which was prominent in the sixteenth century, had also declined in our period. Finally, just outside the delta was the port of Chittagong, which had been under Arakanese control until 1666, when it was conquered by the Mughals. The Arakanese and the pirates of these waters had controlled the trade of the Meghna estuary, and the Mughals did not bring these areas under complete control until much later.

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The Legacy of the Immediate Past

By the first millennium AD, a system of interlinked trading networks between east and west had been established, with India playing a pivotal role in this system, both by its central location on the east–west sea routes and by its capacity to provide exports to, and absorb imports from, the system. What had for several centuries been a stable long-distance trade in essentially high-value luxury goods began a steady process of expansion from about the ninth century, spurred by the confluence of a number of factors that operated in the succeeding centuries. The rise and expansion of Islam was perhaps the most critical of these factors, consolidating and integrating large areas of arid and semi-arid country in strategically located meeting points between the continents of Asia and Europe. Among the several elements of dynamism and growth brought about by the expansion of Islam was a commercial ethic and commercial practices which spread through the Islamic lands like wild-fire, generating an economic growth in these and neighbouring lands which sustained itself for several centuries. As a part of this cultural dynamism there was a diaspora of commercial groups from the original homelands of Islam to the outer reaches of the then-known maritime world.

Not much later than that, Europe began to stir from the long slumber of the Middle Ages and show the vigour of agricultural and technological growth, with internal and maritime commerce picking up gradually. Around the time of the heyday of Islamic power, on the eastern end of the Asian continent, Chinese political and economic power was on the ascendant. China rapidly became the most dynamic and economically productive of regions, and direct contacts were established between the commercial specialists of West Asia and these prosperous zones of East Asia. In between these extremes, the Indian subcontinent, the South East Asian islands and their mainland had already featured in commercial

exchange. When the scale of these exchanges accelerated from the tenth century, these two regions were drawn in and a systematic pattern of long-distance trade began to develop over the next five centuries.

The half millennium from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries saw a remarkable increase in world trade in which the five regions of Europe, West Asia, India, South East Asia and China were knit together in a complementary exchange of goods, services, people and culture. Trade was transformed in nature from a low-volume, high-value trade to a bulk trade in a variety of commodities of daily consumption. The volume of shipping increased enormously, egged on by advances in maritime technology, especially on the two extremes of Europe-West Asia and China. There were setbacks, however, when Islamic political power fragmented in the twelfth century, and at about the same time China went into decline after the great heights reached under the Sung dynasty. In neither case was the setback to trade anything other than temporary. In West Asia the mechanics and the structures of trade set in place continued to operate from different Islamic states of the region. In China the political instability following on the Mongol conquest did not prevent sustained participation in overseas trade and China's role in that trade continued.

India saw positive developments in this direction with the penetration of Islamic power into the subcontinent and the creation of a number of Islamic kingdoms. This process served to bring India closer into the commercial networks of world trade, offering Islam both a land route and a sea route to the productive capacity of the subcontinent. It accelerated from the thirteenth century, and India became closely integrated into the world commercial economy. South East Asia had always been an intrinsic part of this long-distance trade, both by its location and the commodities it fed into the trade. These opportunities had enabled it to develop political and social systems facilitating its participation in this trade through a succession of trade-based empires located athwart the major sea routes. Thus an interlocking system of inter-and intra-regional trade had developed and was in full swing by the fifteenth century.

Its features were clearly discernible by the end of that century. Though embracing an exchange of goods from Europe at one end to China at the other, there evolved staging areas and intermeshing mechanisms to enable the smooth flow of commerce over these long distances. The Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf formed one such staging area: here all that was west of it met all that was east. The Indian subcontinent was another, its long coastline to the west and the east enabling it to look in both directions across the Indian Ocean. South East Asia, through the Melaka and Sunda Straits, was another staging area with its myriad of large and small islands on the gateways of commerce. All these areas provided, at one time or another, centres of trade of more or less importance, selected on grounds of strategic location, proximity to producing regions, and by active state intervention in the promotion of trade.

One feature of the growth of long-distance trade in this second millennium AD was the rise of entrepôt ports which served as redistribution points for goods of the region and inter-regionally. During the fifteenth century a few of these ports had established themselves in such roles in the Indian Ocean trade. The most celebrated of these was Melaka, strategically placed on the Melaka Straits, serving to open the doors of the Indian Ocean traders to South East Asia and the China Seas, and vice versa. The system of trade developed in the fifteenth century with Melaka as a central place has been much described and analysed. During this period there were two similar entrepôts on the Indian subcontinent, on its western coast, in Calicut and Cambay. Descriptions of Melaka point to a vital trade link between that port and Cambay, and the accounts of Cambay's two arms—one extending westwards to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and the other eastwards of Melaka—are well known to maritime historians. Cambay strengthened its entrepôt role of redistributing goods across regions with an equally important role as an original exporter and importer to a vast producing and consuming hinterland.

Another such entrepôt that developed in the fifteenth century on the Malabar coast was Calicut. Calicut combined a number of features that enabled it to play this role. It was a suitable landfall

for ships crossing the Arabian Sea, guided by the Eli Mountain, one of the few prominent marks on the western coast of India visible from far out at sea. It was a suitable resting place for those ships intending to proceed further east to the spice markets of South East Asia. It was located proximate to good pepper and other spice-producing country. Its role in long-distance trade had been enhanced by the arrival of Chinese ships for a period from the end of the fourteenth century. Though the Chinese stopped coming abruptly after the first decade of the fifteenth century, their attention to the port had raised its profile in contemporary international trade. All these entrepôt ports—Melaka, Cambay and Calicut—developed mechanisms and infrastructures designed to facilitate long-distance trade. There is also a remarkable similarity in state policies and royal involvement in trade in these three kingdoms; all three encouraged trade.

Another common feature in the development of trade in these places was the migration and settlement of substantial merchant communities from widely dispersed lands. The nature of long-distance trade resulted inevitably in participating merchants having to settle for long periods of time in the terminal points of trade. This had of course been a feature of this trade from the period of the early classical civilizations, when the trade increased in volume and regularity. The great Islamic explosion and the expansion of Arab trade from the ninth century accelerated this trend of settling colonies of expatriate merchants in major trading centres. In India this led to the first Arab merchant settlements all along the western coast, from Sind in the north to the port of Kayal in the southern tip, near Comorin. These Arab and Indo-Arab communities further strengthened the trade base of the Indian entrepôt ports. On the east coast of India, near the southern tip, the port of Nagapatnam had fulfilled entrepôt roles in relation to South East Asian trade from the twelfth century. But neither it nor any of the other ports of this coast was required to feature prominently in trans-shipment on the long-distance trade. The same was true of the delta ports of Bengal. The first such port that developed on the east coast was Masulipatnam, which grew from the 1560s and began to link the trade of the eastern and western sectors of the Indian Ocean.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, then, the system of long-distance intercontinental trade linking Europe with continental Asia was well in place. Within this system, the opportunity existed for trade to wax and wane, depending on specific regional, political and economic factors. The one major dynamic of this century was the entry of the Portuguese through the Cape sea route, a dynamic that will be shown to have changed significantly some sectors of trade while hardly affecting others. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the meeting points of long-distance trade were Melaka, Calicut, Cambay and Aden. Asian trade consisted of the main-line east–west trade from the South China seas to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. This trade continued to carry the traditional goods of pepper, drugs, dyes and spices but was beginning to diversify into foodgrains, textiles, porcelain, domestic tools and utensils. The European demand for pepper had increased from the fifteenth century and it was being carried in bulk, with shipping construction adapting to the carriage of such bulk commodities as well as foodgrains. A second element of Asian commerce was the coastal trade, and here the lengthy coastline of India to the east and west, embracing several producing regions of great diversity, favoured this trade. Its growth was fostered by long-distance trade and the entrepôts from which it was carried out. The coastal trade consisted of sailings up and down the coast as well as between the east coast and west.

The Gujarat coastal region was emerging as a core region of Indian Ocean trade. A number of factors favoured this development. Its location within easy access of the Islamic heartlands of Arabia and Persia was the first advantage. Coastal vessels hugged the coast along Sind and Makran on to these destinations without hazard of the Ocean. Larger ships used the monsoons for swift passage across. The emergence of an independent political state in Gujarat in 1441 under an Islamic dynasty enabled it to pursue policies fostering the growth of trade in Gujarati ports. The fact that Gujarat had earlier been annexed to the sultanate of Delhi helped it to develop communications with the Gangetic plains. It was during these years that Cambay grew as the major Gujarati port in the Indian Ocean trade. The Arab, Persian and Turkish

connections strengthened the strong indigenous commercial base of Hindus and Jains. The spread of Islam in these parts brought into existence domiciled Gujarati Muslim communities of merchants, mariners and seamen who took advantage of the Islamic connection.

Cambay and some neighbouring Gujarati ports served several functions. They were in the first instance places of initial export of the produce of the hinterland—cotton textiles, indigo and foodgrains being the major commodities. This export was directed to West Asian markets—Persia, southern Arabia, Red Sea and east Africa—to the Malabar coast ports and to the South East Asian ports of Melaka, Acheh, Bantam and Grisek, among others. A second function of Gujarati ports was to serve as a conduit for the trans-shipment of Malabar export goods to West Asia, particularly pepper, cardamom, ginger and cinnamon. To procure these goods Gujarati merchants, particularly the Hindus, engaged in a thriving coastal trade to ports such as Calicut, Cannanore, Cochin and Quilon, exchanging Gujarati for Malabar goods. A third function was to store and re-export South East Asian goods brought in through the direct trade between Gujarat, Melaka, and the other neighbouring ports mentioned above. This trade exchange brought the valuable spices—cloves, nutmeg and mace—and dyes and gums of South East Asian origin to Cambay for re-export to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Gujarat's direct trade with South East Asia appeared in the thirteenth century, with the Sumatran pepper ports of Pase and Pedie as the first ports of call. There is a view that attributes the Islamization of these first South East Asian port-city states in part to Gujarati enterprise. In succeeding years the Gujaratis seemed to have penetrated further into South East Asia, frequenting the north Javanese ports of Japara, Demak and Grisek, and possibly into the Moluccas. In north Java also they seem to have had a hand in extending the Islamization process. Gujarati sailors used both the Melaka and the Sunda Straits as their gateways into South East Asia. After the foundation and growth of the Melaka emporium, and the increase in power of that state, Gujaratis seem to have concentrated on that port and used it as their main South East

Asian trading centre. By the end of the fifteenth century Gujarati commercial interest was dominant in Melaka, with a thousand merchants domiciled in the port and a few thousand more back up support in various marine and service activities. Their trade was important enough for the Gujaratis to be assigned a Syabandar to administer it. They had influence with the sultan and strongly supported him against the Portuguese when the Portuguese first turned their attention to this port. A contemporary Portuguese chronicler says that it was Gujarati merchants who persuaded Sultan Mohamad to attack the Portuguese fleet under Lopes do Segueira in 1509. Later, when Albuquerque attacked the port, he saw Gujarati vessels anchored there, and their crew fought valiantly with the Melakans against the Portuguese. Albuquerque set fire to several of their vessels in reprisal.

Thus, at the arrival of the Portuguese, Gujarat and its port of Cambay held a dominant position in Indian Ocean trade. Gujarat was a vital link in the trans-continental trading system. Its westward and eastward trade was well established, as was its role in the coastal trade of India. Its merchants and mariners were dispersed throughout the trading region and expatriate settlements were constantly enriched by links with home. These trade links began to play a cultural role as well, as disseminators of Islam. The merchants were by no means exclusively Muslims; there were important Hindu elements as well, operating in the long-distance and coastal trade.

Malabar was next to Gujarat in importance as a trading region. Though it had enjoyed a prominent position in long-distance trade from considerably earlier than Gujarat, it was overtaken by Gujarat in the thirteenth century owing largely to the developments noted above. Malabar derived its importance from its strategic location on the trade routes and its production of pepper and spices. But it lacked Gujarat's advantage of a large and rich hinterland and produced little else that was exportable. The high mountain ranges restricted access to the interior and it had very little import trade. Malabar also had a thriving trade with the Islamic lands of West Asia, a trade developed from the early period of Arab settlements in Malabar ports. The Arabs used Malabar as a stopping point on their onward sailings into South East Asia. In this way there was

much direct trade between Calicut and other Malabar ports, with the Red Sea ports of Aden and Jeddah. This trade was at its peak in the beginning of the sixteenth century, with Calicut enjoying a period of hegemony over other port-states of Malabar, and especially over its major rival—the state of Cochin.

Direct trade between Malabar and South East Asia must have gone on for a considerable time before the sixteenth century, if only because of the proximity to Coromandel which had always enjoyed these direct links. The Arab contacts would have further widened this direct trade with the port-city states of the Melaka Straits and beyond. It is possible that the expansion of direct Gujarati trade to South East Asia may have cut into the trade of Malabar. Another significant trade relationship of Malabar was with the Maldive Islands to the south-west. Malabar merchants had access to the produce of these islands which they brought into the wider trading system. They kept alive their maritime skills by their frequent sailings to these islands. Malabar had an active coastal trade to Coromandel and to Sri Lanka.

The backbone of indigenous maritime enterprise in Malabar was the Malabari Muslim community of Mapillahs. The product of mixed Arab and Malayali descent, they acquired an identity of their own, distinct from local society by their firm adherence to Islam, but retaining many elements of social customs and legal practice of the local society from which they emerged. They became specialists in seafaring and trade, occupying a special position in the several coastal states where they were settled. They were closely allied to the strongest of these states, Calicut, and assisted in directing coastal traffic and keeping sea-lanes free from piracy. They were strongly entrenched in the port of Cannanore, where for a time they exercised political power. In Calicut, the head of the *paradesi* Muslims, an Arab, along with the head of the Mapillahs, was responsible for all commercial transaction at the end of the fifteenth century. The Mapillahs were divided into a few prominent houses or clans, some of which emerged to claim regal status in the early part of the sixteenth century.

In eastern India the trade of Coromandel was on the ascendant with the expansion of the Vijayanagar empire embracing large

portions of peninsular India. Coromandel's long-distance trade was primarily directed to South East Asia, both to the mainland ports of Burma and Siam and to the Melaka Straits states, Java, and the archipelago islands. In the tenth to thirteenth centuries this trade seems to have been organized through large guilds of merchants which established colonies in several of the places with which they traded. By the fourteenth century these guilds appear to have folded up and were taken over by prominent merchant houses of the major commercial castes—Chetties, Komatties, Balijas. As in Malabar, an Indo-Arab community as well as a community of Tamil Muslim converts emerged to participate actively in trade. Both these merchant groups of Hindus and Muslims seem to have acquired some political power through intermarriage with Malay royalty. These Hindu and Muslim groups were to be found also in other port-cities, in influential positions of harbour-masters and managers of royal trade.

The staple of this trade was textiles manufactured in the multitude of weaving villages of the Carnatic. Coromandel textiles had already, by the sixteenth century, penetrated the markets of South East Asia, and were being distributed through entrepôt ports such as Melaka to the pepper and spice producing districts as a medium for the exchange of these goods. Coromandel itself did not consume much spice but took in tin, dyes and gums, and the difference was largely made up in gold. South East Asia was a major supplier of gold to the Carnatic, and the current coin in trade transactions was the gold pagoda. The trade did not flow out of one or two central ports but was spread across a number of ports, all of which shared equal physical difficulties and hazards. Nagapatnam had been a port of relatively greater significance, but in the fifteenth century there were several other ports—Devanampatnam, Mylapore, Paleacat—from which trade was carried out. Like the Gujarati merchants, the south Indian Chetties and Chulia Muslims settled in distant trading centres and operated in family networks, with members taking up brief periods of residence in overseas trading posts, to be replaced in turn by others.

Very little is known of the trade of Bengal in this period, though earlier Bengal had a flourishing overseas trade with South East Asia.

In the Hindu–Buddhist period of Indian cultural contacts, it is known that cultural transmission took place via Bengal to several South East Asian states. Bengal came under Islamic rule at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when the old and prosperous Hindu kingdoms slipped into a state of decline. It is possible that the once flourishing Bengali Hindu shipping and overseas commerce also declined. When evidence next emerges of Bengali overseas commerce it is seen to be directed by Bengali Muslim merchants. The Portuguese chronicles speak of a tradition that Pase was converted to Islam by Bengali merchants, and that there was a large colony of Bengali merchants in this port in the fourteenth century. Early Portuguese evidence also speaks of Bengal as a major trading partner of Melaka. This fragmentary evidence shows that there must have been continuity in Bengal's trading traditions, and the change would have been in the ports from which this trade was carried on, caused by political factors and the shifting flow of the delta outlets of the Ganges.

It was into this system that the Portuguese intruded with violence and aggression in 1498. It is now generally accepted that, in spite of the destabilization and disruption caused by Portuguese initial actions of the first two decades, they did not destroy existing trade networks nor seriously alter trade patterns. They did introduce the new element of the Cape all-sea route as a vehicle for commerce between Asia and Europe. And this affected India most during the sixteenth century as India was to be the destination of Portuguese sailings throughout this century. Also, as the centre of Portuguese activities in Asia, India (and especially its western coast) saw the most perceivable changes during this period. The trading region and coastline most affected was Malabar. Here the Portuguese impact was felt not only on the Ocean and the waterfront but also on the balance of power in the states system of the coast.

The most drastic initial effect was in the violent destruction of Arab trading interests and Arab sailing to Malabar by systematic attacks both in Malabar ports and in the Red Sea entrance. The strong expatriate Arab community in various Malabar ports was dispersed, and though when the dust settled Arab sailings resumed with and without Portuguese passes, it never returned to its previous

position. The opportunity provided by the departure of the Arabs was utilised by local Mapillah merchants and by Gujaratis. The Mapillahs gained an ascendancy in Calicut they had not earlier enjoyed. They drew close to the Zamorin as the managers of his maritime affairs and as the organisers of his resistance to the intrusions of the Portuguese. In alliance with the Zamorin and a few other subordinate rajas, the Mapillahs engaged in a prolonged conflict with the Portuguese on the seas. This conflict extended even to the Maldive Islands which they effectively used as bases to undermine Portuguese patrols of the sea routes.

Gujaratis took advantage of these disputes by enhancing the role of Cambay as an entrepôt at the expense of Calicut. They shifted the direct trade of South East Asia from Calicut to Cambay and made it the clearing house for South East Asian spices. They also either directly exported Malabar pepper to the Red Sea or shipped it in large quantities to Cambay to make it a redistribution point which Arab and Persian traders would frequent. Malabar rulers found, in these Gujaratis, customers for their pepper to replace the Arabs and to help them undermine the monopolies which they had been forced to concede to the Portuguese by contracts. Another merchant group which benefited from the Portuguese hostility to Arabs was the Coromandel Hindu Chetties and Konkanis. They spread out to the southern ports where Portuguese control was stronger; and especially at Cochin, where the Portuguese would not admit of any Muslim trade, they became major buyers and shippers of pepper as well as providers of import goods to that port. The Chetties and Konkanis became intermediaries for the Portuguese with Malabar rajas, and in the process increased their influence and trade along the coast.

The polarization between Portuguese and Malabar rulers augmented the power of the Mapillahs, on whom the latter were dependent to resist Portuguese claims. Mapillah resistance to the Portuguese gathered momentum in the course of the century, and they moved from commercial autonomy to claiming political sovereignty in the ports where they were dominant. They erected forts, armed themselves on land and on sea, and fought many battles with the Portuguese. They were seen as a threat to the rajas. Finally

even the Zamorin of Calicut, whose ally they had been in his conflict with the Portuguese, decided to turn against these former allies. He joined the Portuguese in attacks on Mapillah centres of power and, by the end of the sixteenth century, they were beaten, disarmed and dispersed along the coast. This defeat of the Mapillahs also meant the weakening of Calicut. It lost its dominant position in Malabar trade and its old rival, Cochin, now a Portuguese fortified city, was on the ascendant.

Cochin, for a time the capital of the *Estado da India*, and later its second city, rose to a powerful position in Malabar and Asian trade. Though its commerce was basically the Portuguese crown trade, soon to be supplemented by the trade of Portuguese settlers(*casados*), this business was growing and important enough to make Cochin a thriving port. It was the assembly point for the pepper contracted with diverse Malabar rulers. From Cochin the Portuguese crown sent out voyages along the major trade routes, to Gujarat and the Persian Gulf, eastwards to Coromandel, Bengal and South East Asia and, with the establishment of Macao, into Manila and the China Seas. With the putting in place of the passes system to control coastal trade along western India, trade from Gujarat was diverted to Cochin. With signs of flagging Cochin trade towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese opened up the trade of Cochin to private traders. This boosted trade, especially to other strongholds of Portuguese settlers' trade in Melaka and Bengal. Despite the developments Cochin remained essentially a port of the Portuguese system with minimal links to the Asian operated trade.

When the concentration of Portuguese power moved northwards along the coast to Goa and then to Diu, Daman and Bassein, the disruption was less extensive and the adaptation more orderly. Here Portuguese power was mainly felt on the seas, and even this was not as pervasive as in Malabar. Gujarati trade grew during this century largely owing to the developments on the Indian mainland and the closer links with the Islamic world. Cambay continued as a major entrepôt of the trade westwards, eastwards and coastal, though changes of levels in the Gulf of Cambay were beginning to make sailing into the port cumbersome; towards the

end of the century shipping was shifting to Surat. The shipping to Cambay and neighbouring ports was vulnerable to Portuguese challenge, being susceptible to blockade at the entrance to the Gulf and along the Kathiawar coast. Gujarat's textile industry expanded to meet the demands of Indian Ocean trade and textiles were exported from Cambay, Broach, Diu and lesser ports. The Sultan of Gujarat was at first a member of the anti-Portuguese alliance of trading and maritime powers, but later made his peace with them.

When the Portuguese captured the strategic port of Diu in 1554, they were in a position to dictate terms to the trade of Gujarat and put in place a system of passes through which they were able to tax this trade from the fort and customs post of Diu. The Portuguese had also taken Hormuz in 1513, and so were able to control sailings from Gujarat to the Persian Gulf through passes. In a sense, this proved advantageous to Gujarati trade which was now able to operate under Portuguese protection. This was assured because of the good relations first with the sultan of Gujarat and then with the Mughal empire. Thus, after an initial interruption, Gujarat's westward trade to west Asia continued and expanded in this century. Gujarati vessels were sailing to Aden, Mocha, Hormuz and Basra with or without Portuguese passes. So dependent had the Portuguese become on Gujarati trade in various parts of the Estado that they dared not interrupt this trade.

To the north and north-west of Gujarat, Sind had been a trading area of some significance, providing rice of cheapness and abundance and special varieties of textiles. Both these commodities had good markets in West Asia, and there had been close ties between the Indus delta ports and the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. The river provided access well into the interior. The port of Lahiri Bandar was busy in the sixteenth century and Gujarati traders, because of the proximity, handled a large share of the trade. After Portuguese naval power shifted northwards, and with the acquisition of the fort of Diu, they were in a position to influence and impose upon the trade of the Indus delta. They seem to have done this both by taxing it through passes as well as by themselves participating in the trade. Under Portuguese protection Sind vessels traded in large numbers to Hormuz, and the trade appeared to have been shared

by Portuguese and Indian merchants of the neighbourhood. The shifts in the Indus delta that took place about this time seem to have made approach to the major ports and anchorage more difficult. Yet in the early seventeenth century trade was brisk in these parts, such as to persuade both the English and the Dutch to seek to establish themselves in that province. When Sind became a province of the Mughal empire in 1591, it was easier for the merchants to reject Portuguese claims, and Indian merchants began to trade more freely from Lahiri Bandar.

Gujarati South East Asian trade seems to have undergone some changes. It was noted above that Gujarati interests had assisted the sultan of Melaka in resisting Portuguese aggression. The destruction of the sultanate and the hostility to the new occupiers of Melaka made Gujaratis avoid the port of Melaka as their chief port of call in South East Asia. Portuguese policy was to favour one of the rivals of the Gujaratis to the India–South East Asia trade, namely the Coromandel Hindus. Soon an alternative trade centre was established in Acheh which grew rapidly as a challenge to Portuguese Melaka. Gujarati trade now flocked to Acheh, making this port an entrepôt of east–west trade. Soon Gujaratis and the Mapillahs of Malabar were using Acheh to beat Portuguese claims of domination over the trade routes. A Gujarati settlement grew in the port of Acheh, and Gujarati merchants established close links with the royalty as well as with the *orang kaya* administration of the state. This was a lucrative trade for the Gujaratis. From here they derived pepper, nutmeg, cloves, mace, tin, gold, ivory and elephants—all commodities that sold at high profit in India and some in West Asia. Gujarati sailings into the archipelago islands continued in the sixteenth century. They were trading in Bantam, Japara and Grisek, and probably even sailed into the Moluccas in search of spices, and to sell Indian textiles.

Goa was an important growth centre after its conquest by the Portuguese. As the seat of the Estado and the centre of the trade of the Portuguese Crown it had an official base to its growth. Previously, Goa had been a medium-sized port feeding the hinterland of Konkan and Bijapur, with a primarily westward direction to its trade. Then the Portuguese linked it up with the eastward

trade to Melaka and China. Its major growth, however, was in the coastal trade of western India, for which the Portuguese provided security and direction. It was here that the Portuguese passes policy was most effective. This coastal trade linked ports of Malabar and Kanara in the south with Cambay, Chaul and Diu in the north. The trade embraced pepper and spices of Malabar and Kanara, coconuts and coconut produce from the same regions, rice of Kanara, textiles, cotton and opium from Gujarat. The trade was organized in seasonal convoys of hundreds of vessels sailing northwards and southwards in *kafilas*, with Portuguese protection, and provided with Portuguese passes, calling at Portuguese ports to pay customs dues. Gujaratis, Saraswat Brahmins and Konkanis were freely admitted to trade in Goa and were responsible for a large share of the Asian trade of that port.

The Bay of Bengal trade also registered a steady growth in the sixteenth century without any major changes in patterns and direction. It is generally held that the Portuguese presence was nowhere near as effective in this ocean as it was in the west, though recent research has tended to identify areas of Portuguese intrusion especially at the level of private trade of an unofficial settler population. As noted above, the Portuguese conquest of Melaka created space for Coromandel Hindus through the expulsion of Muslim trading interests. The Portuguese attracted the settlement of Coromandel merchants in Melaka with incentives, and this seems to have been a factor of growth in Coromandel trade. The direct trade between Coromandel ports and Melaka increased, as did partnership ventures between these merchants and the Portuguese. What is more, Coromandel Hindus based in Melaka used Portuguese protection and armed naval support to conduct voyages deep into the archipelago. Though there is no separate evidence of their activities, it may be presumed that Coromandel Muslims shifted their trade to Acheh together with their other co-religionists, the Gujarati Muslims.

Portuguese activities appear to have had little impact on Coromandel's eastward trade, and there seems to have been a growth in this trade in the second half of the century. This growth took place despite the political decline of the Vijayanagar empire,

and its loosening hold on its extensive southern territories. The trade was carried out from innumerable port outlets along the entire stretch of the coast. The powerful southern Indian trade in various parts of South East Asia was noted by the Dutch and the English in the early seventeenth century, when they began their first voyages to these parts. The textiles of Coromandel had spread deep into South East Asian markets, not only the major central markets of Java but even to remote islands. European traders saw the use of these textiles as media of exchange for spices, losing no time in directing their attention to Coromandel ports in search of textiles suitable for the South East Asian market.

An area of growth was the trade to the ports of mainland South East Asia. This trade grew on its own by bilateral contacts with the kingdoms of Burma and southern Thailand, as well as through Portuguese mediation. The nature of the bilateral trade and how it grew is not well documented, but the evidence at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth shows that Coromandel merchants had made inroads in the trade to Arakan, Pegu, Tenasserim and Ayuthya. It appears that the growth of state power and the consolidation of territories in this region liberated commercial forces which led to trade exchanges. The abundant rice supply of these kingdoms, together with a variety of other produce—gums, dyes, lacquer, rubies, tin, ivory, elephants—were exchanged for Coromandel coarse and fine textiles, steel, salt, fish products, hides, etc. The balance was made up in gold. This region was a major source of gold to Coromandel. In the second half of the sixteenth century this trade to mainland South East Asia seems to have expanded with Portuguese assistance and protection. Portuguese domination of the seas in the north-eastern corner of the Bay enabled them to obstruct and tax this trade and merchants, as in western India, paid protection costs to the Portuguese. Portuguese unofficial settlements were entrenched for a period in and around Syriam on the lower Burmese coast, and there was a great deal of piracy from which Indian ships had to purchase protection. This expanded trade led to south Indian merchant settlements of Muslims and Hindus in the major Burmese and Thai ports, as had already happened in the islands and the archipelago.

Portuguese settlements were established on the Coromandel coast in the sixteenth century, the most important being in Nagapatnam where they were given considerable rights by the Nayak of Tanjore and permitted to erect a fort. Later *casado* settlements arose north of this port, in Porto Novo and San Thome. Trade was carried on from here to the Portuguese settlements of Bengal and Burma, and to Melaka. But the Portuguese at all times had only a minor share of this trade. Nagapatnam was a major port of South East Asian trade, but seems to have declined after Portuguese occupation, perhaps because the Muslims dispersed to the neighbouring ports of Adirampatnam, Karikal and Nagore. The control of commerce by enforcing Asian trade to take out passes was never very successful in the Bay of Bengal. The Portuguese did not have a base there from which they could send out flotillas of cruisers to watch over sea-lanes. That was an option never available to the Portuguese having, as they did, enough trouble enforcing their claims in the western coast.

Though the decline of the Vijayanagar empire may have produced some obstacles to trade, this was compensated for by developments in the central and northern Deccan where the kingdom of Golconda expanded its area of domination and extended to the north Coromandel coast into the Krishna/Godavari delta. This brought into existence a commercial growth area in north Coromandel and led to the development of a new port, Masulipatnam, the one real innovation in port development in this period. Prior to the sixteenth century Masulipatnam had been one of several small-sized ports which fed goods to other ports to the south, such as Paleacat and Mylapore. Its rise began in the second half of the sixteenth century and picked up by the 1580s to a condition of prosperity. At first it locked into the major sector of Coromandel's trade to South East Asia—to Melaka, Acheh, Makassar, the Javanese ports—and then into the mainland ports of Arakan and lower Burma. The port drew from a rich rice-producing hinterland with a busy textile industry, specializing in mass production of staple cotton cloth as well as in dyeing and painting them in the very bright colours produced by the indigo and by the dye roots to be found in the river delta. Further in the interior there was also a

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steel industry, the largest in India at that time, producing for export. As the Golconda state consolidated itself, good communications were developed with the capital and with populous towns and markets of the north and west.

A new element in the trade of Coromandel, and what gave Masulipatnam a special place among Coromandel ports, was the forging of trade links with the west, with Gujarat(Surat), the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. This Persian connection was strengthened by the adherence to the Shiite sect of Islam by the Golconda rulers and nobility. This gave them favoured treatment in Persian ports and brought in a substantial Persian merchant migration to settle in the port and the country. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Golconda had emerged as an Indian Ocean port, looking eastwards and westwards. Golconda rulers, anxious to develop their trading ambitions, fostered friendly relations with the Portuguese. They took passes from them for the safe conduct of their ships to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. With the rise of Masulipatnam, Golconda Muslims and domiciled Persians became another of the Bay of Bengal's itinerant merchant communities, settling for the most part in Acheh, Syriam, Tenasserim and later, Ayuthya.

As noted above, evidence of Bengal trade in the Indian ocean is very scanty and past historians relying heavily on Portuguese records have postulated that the Portuguese totally dominated this trade, conducting it from their several unofficial settlements in the delta. The most recent and thorough study of this subject by Subrahmanyam has contested this view that the Portuguese trade engrossed totally the trade of Bengal. There is no doubt that Portuguese settlers were present in large numbers in various riverine ports and in Burma, and that some of them were adventurers and freebooters who organized under themselves minor armadas which were able to pillage and tax Bengal shipping. There is no reason to believe that this stopped Bengal shipping. Neither is there reason to believe that this stopped Bengal trade totally, as continuities are seen in Bengal trade to places of its traditional commercial contact. Bengal trade southwards and south-westwards appears to have continued, to the Maldives, Malabar and perhaps to West Asia. Bengal

trade to Burma, Malaya, Acheh and the Sumatran ports appears certainly to have continued.

In keeping with the entrenchment of Islamic political power in Bengal, its large-scale shipping now passed into the hands of powerful Muslim merchant houses domiciled in Bengal. Increasingly, they got the support of the administration and the Islamic nobility holding high official positions. They were also the clients for a variety of goods handled by this overseas trade, particularly elephants, which were now in great demand for military and haulage purposes. The rulers utilized their influence with the Portuguese to secure for them safe conduct passes in their long-distance sailings. The growing Islamic domination of the trade led to an increase in sailings to west Asia and to Surat.

Portuguese activity in Bengal had picked up from the 1530s, both the trade of the Crown and that of private traders. In the early years, Chittagong and Satgaon were the major ports of this trade, but later their trade shifted to the western part of the delta and they also developed an interest in Orissa. The Portuguese were deeply interested in Bengal and Orissa as providers of foodgrains to their possessions in Malabar, Ceylon and Melaka. The major growth in Portuguese trade with Bengal was spearheaded by private traders settled in Portuguese possessions of Cochin, Ceylon, Nagapatnam and Melaka. Portuguese envoys secured permission from the sultan of Bengal to settle and trade in Satgaon and Chittagong in 1538, and thereafter their influence grew. They were able to utilize the internecine quarrels between Hindu rajas and the sultan to expand their presence and assist one ruler against another. Many served as mercenaries in the army and as marines in armed boats in the delta waters. There was a good deal of privateering, piracy and slave-raiding, and none of the local rulers was strong enough to resist Portuguese penetration. The most spectacular of these adventurers was Gonzales, who ruled the island of Sandwip for some years in the first decade of the seventeenth century. He was expelled from there by the king of Arakan in 1615, who destroyed the Portuguese settlements in Chittagong, Dianga and Sandwip.

Akbar permitted the Portuguese to settle and trade in Hughli in 1580, and gradually the bulk of Bengal's overseas trade shifted

from Satgaon to Hughli. The Portuguese settled in Hughli were more disposed to trade peacefully, perhaps because of the growing power of the Mughals. They spread along the river on both banks and a market town soon arose there to become the major mart of Bengal. It seems probable that Portuguese and Bengali shipping proceeded uninterrupted from this port until, in 1632, the Mughals took the port away from the Portuguese. There is evidence of Hughli trade in the main networks to South East Asia, Coromandel, Malabar, Ceylon, Maldives, Gujarat and West Asia. Its control and direction passed unmistakably into the hands of the Mughal administration and Bengal's merchant community.

One effect of the large Portuguese presence and participation in trade towards the end of the sixteenth century was to tie Bengal close to the networks of *Estado* trade. The *Carreira* made regular voyages to Bengal from Goa and Cochin and there was Portuguese trade from Melaka and Colombo to Bengal. The trade to Cochin was particularly close and the Bengal trade became an important aspect of Cochin's flagging commercial activity. The increasing importance of Bengal as a food-supply centre to Malabar and to Ceylon was probably contributed to by the Portuguese connection. Thus, while in essence the Portuguese did nothing to structurally alter the nature of Bengal trade, they strengthened certain sectors at the expense of others. All in all, it is difficult to conclude that in the sixteenth century the trade of Bengal was dominated by the Portuguese, or that they had even a significant share of it. Trade continued to flow along traditional channels to old markets and adapted itself to Portuguese demands. The delta coast, with many estuaries and islands, was suitable country for a freebooting naval people to exploit and many Portuguese did this by exploits of bravery and terror. But these were not such as to bring long-term changes to the commercial scene.

The sixteenth century was thus a very eventful one in the maritime history of India. Within the subcontinent there were a number of elements that contributed to the growth of demand and of mechanisms to satisfy this demand. Large states were being con-

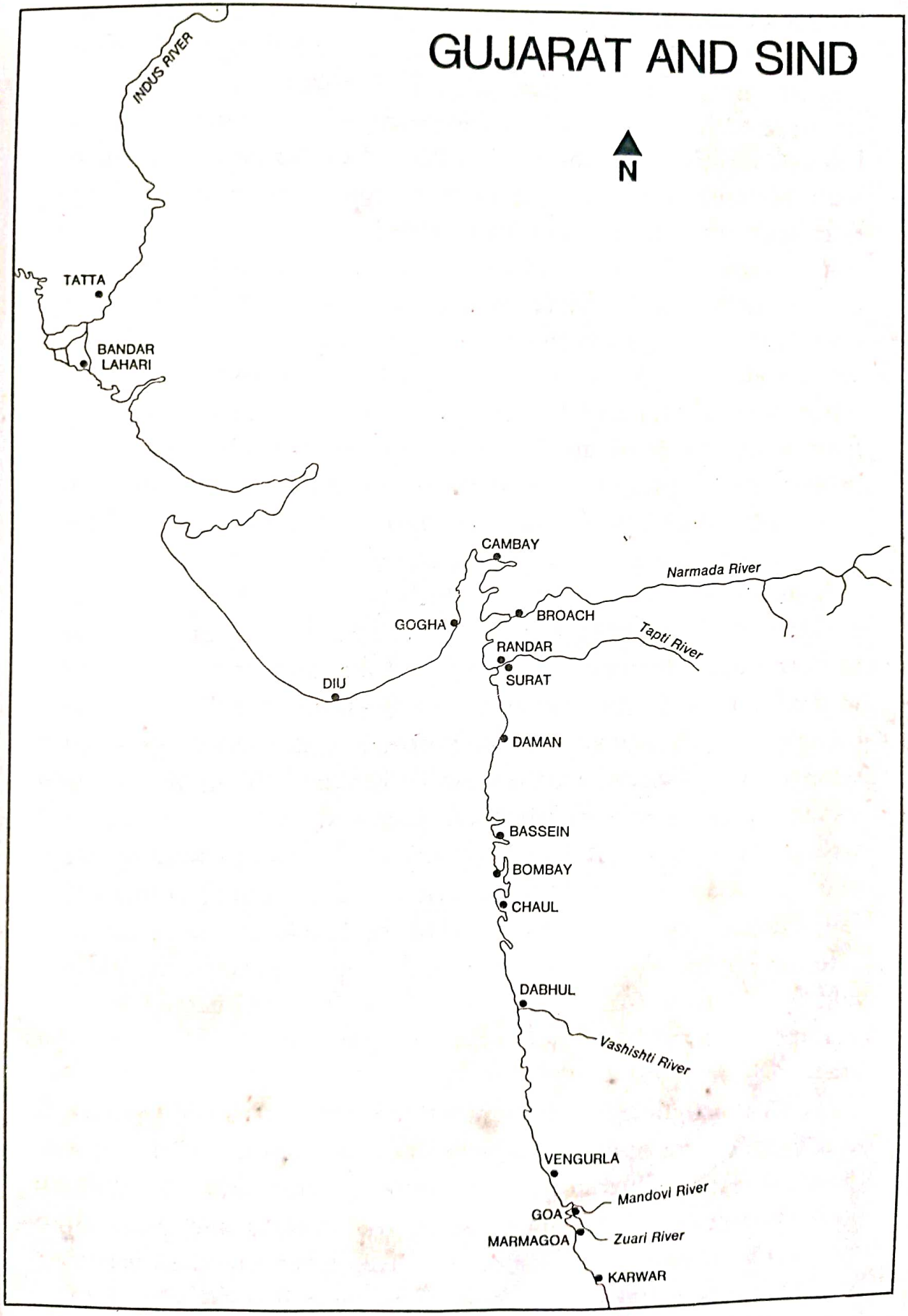
solidated throughout the country with regulated systems of administration and communication. These states had control over maritime areas which thus became integrated more with the interior. Ports, merchant interests and seafaring and coastal services were developing to meet this increased activity. In the trading partner regions to the west and east of India, developments were also taking place towards quickening the pace of commercial activity. The Portuguese appeared as the cloud on the horizon. They appeared as another tribute-gathering force in this maritime world. They initially distracted the attention of coastal rulers and merchants and grossly interfered with the system. When the dust had settled, some continuity was restored, but not without some changes—changes not fundamental but important enough to necessitate realignments. It is justifiable to say that the overall input of the Portuguese towards an expansion of Asian and Indian commerce was minimal. It would be interesting to speculate on the sixteenth century without the Portuguese. Would the Melaka emporium have coped with the expansion of Asian commerce? Would Calicut have emerged as the empire of Kerala? Would Arab domination of western Indian commerce have gone on unimpeded? Would a competition have in any case emerged between expatriate Muslims and Indian Muslims? Would Hindus have been eliminated from sea borne commerce earlier than they were?

3

The Trade of Gujarat

By the beginning of the seventeenth century Surat had emerged to a position of pre-eminence among Gujarat ports. Correspondingly, Cambay had declined as an emporium for goods, primarily because of the difficulty for ships fully loaded with cargo to enter the Gulf and thence the river of Cambay, to a distance conveniently close for unloading goods. After the Mughal conquest of Gujarat it had been imperial policy to centralize long-distance trade at Surat with a view to consolidating the collection of customs. Though the Gulf ports of Broach and Goga continued to be used, the ships that sailed out of these ports appear to have been largely those owned by the royal family and high officials. The picture of Gujarat trade in the early decades of the seventeenth century is one of steady expansion, and there is gathering evidence of the appearance of Gujarati vessels and merchants in the western and eastern sectors of Indian Ocean trade. It appears that the ascendancy Gujarat had acquired in the preceding century is now entrenched by a number of factors that developed in its favour. Gujarat's trade in these early decades of the seventeenth century is a multifaceted one, embracing a westward trade to the Persian Gulf, southern Arabia, the Red Sea and eastern Africa; an eastward trade to island and mainland South East Asia, Bengal and Coromandel; and a very strong coastal trade along the west coast of India.

This trade is boosted by the strong and growing participation of Mughal royalty and upper echelons of the official nobility entrenched in high positions in the western territories of the empire, Gujarat, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Sind and Multan. It is difficult to chart the beginnings of this interest and investment in overseas trade but, by the first decade of the seventeenth century, there is clear evidence of ships owned by members of the imperial family sailing to Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports, and a little later into South East Asia. Apart from the imperial family, ship ownership



Map 1 Gujarat and Sind

becomes widely prevalent among governors of coastal districts and of ports, especially of port shahbandars, whose office gave them an excellent opportunity to participate in overseas trade. With this strong centralization of Gujarat's overseas trade in Surat, merchants, brokers, shroffs and moneylenders flocked to this port-city, which soon built up a commercial infrastructure capable of handling large-scale transactions in overseas trade.

Gujarati trade continued into the seventeenth century the accommodation it had achieved with the Portuguese in the preceding century. Indeed this accommodation gave it a certain strength, and was an element in its continuing growth. The two Portuguese possessions of Diu and Daman gave them an excellent position from which to dominate Gujarati shipping, and the deriving of tribute from Gujarati trade that had begun in the sixteenth century continued. Most Gujarati shipping had to take out cartazes from the Portuguese and pay the Diu customs on their goods, though there is evidence that passes were freely given and the taxation not as rigorously imposed. Under Portuguese protection Gujarati trade to Portuguese Hormuz was strong, and this protection was useful in the Gulf and south Arabian end of the trade routes where Arab piracy was rife. Above all, the Portuguese connection was felt strongest with Goa, where the seasonal *kafilas* of 400 to 500 vessels of varying capacity traded between Goa and (at first) Cambay as well as (later) Surat. A large majority of these ships were owned and operated by Gujaratis from various Gujarat ports. In this way Gujarat trade locked into the trade of the *Estado*, and in particular into the Europe–Asia trading system that operated between Lisbon and Goa. This was largely a sphere of activity for Gujarati banyas, as opposed to the Muslims—who mainly featured in the westward trade.

This Portuguese connection, while being a source of strength, was also a source of weakness. By this the Portuguese continued to pose a threat to Gujarati trade and were in a position to destabilize it if they chose. While not having the obvious and persistent dominance they had for most of the sixteenth century, there is every evidence of Portuguese naval power in these first decades of the seventeenth century, periodically augmented by the arrival of strong

fleets from Europe. The epic defence of Diu from Muslim attack in 1546 was still in living memory, and the Mughals were unable to dislodge the Portuguese from this vital stronghold. Overwhelmingly powerful as they were on land, the Mughals simply had no freedom of action on the seas: and this was a major fact of life of maritime India in these decades. The Mughals were aware of it, the merchants were conscious of it, the Portuguese knew it. It was in this context that some dynamism was injected into maritime India, especially the Gujarati coast, in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, by the appearance of the other European naval powers who could prove more than a match for the Portuguese. And these powers wanted desperately to break into Indian, and especially Gujarati, maritime trade.

Just south of Gujarat, the Bijapur port of Dabhul is seen to be a major centre of overseas trade at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Ships left from this port westwards to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and eastwards to South East Asia. It is possible that these merchants were closely linked to Surat merchant interests. They had to succumb to Portuguese protection, secure passes from them, and pay the Diu tolls. Having done this, they were secure in the trade to Hormuz. Through the first two or three decades of the seventeenth century, ships from Dabhul are reported as calling at Hormuz and Mocha. To the north-west of Gujarat, Sind continued into the early decades as a centre of trade. The port of Lahiri Bandar was beginning to experience problems relating to silting up and the blockage of river estuaries. But trade continued in spite of these inconveniences. Proximity to the Persian Gulf made the trade to Hormuz very convenient. The attractions of trade in the Sind ports were access to a deep hinterland, and thus to markets where a variety of goods could be bought and sold. The Sind weaving industry produced a variety of textiles suitable for West Asian markets. Indigo was also available through Sind ports and there was the desired commodity, rice, in great demand in West Asia. In return, Sind was able to take in a number of import commodities. The trade appears to have been dependent on Portuguese protection. Their strongholds in Diu and Hormuz gave them the opportunity to tax this trade. Shipping arrivals in Hormuz of the late sixteenth

and early seventeenth centuries show upto five or six ships coming each year from Sind. The trade was still going in the 1620s, so that both the English and the Dutch thought it worth the trouble of going to great lengths in establishing a factory there and securing trade concessions. As in Dabhul, Gujarati merchants appear to have spread their tentacles in the Sind trade as well.

The extent of Gujarat's eastward trade in the early decades of the seventeenth century is difficult to gauge. The overwhelming evidence relates to the growing westward trade into the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. This has persuaded historians to accept the proposition that during this period Gujarat's substantial eastward trade began to decline and was replaced by the growth in westward trade. While there is some truth in this proposition, we could go too far in asserting a decline of the trade to South East Asia or, alternatively, in pre-dating it to a time before it actually happened. Early Dutch and English evidence points to the continuing trade of Gujaratis with the ports of Acheh, other north Sumatran ports, Kedah and Bantam. Indeed, it was in places such as Acheh and Bantam that they came into contact with Gujaratis and became aware of the fundamental links between western India and South East Asia. In the early decades of the seventeenth century there is evidence of continuing sailings from Surat and Dabhul to Acheh and Bantam. The main lines of trade were those which were well established in the sixteenth century. Acheh, other Sumatran ports, Kedah and Bantam were centres for the export of Gujarati and Sind textiles, which were then redistributed by local traders into the regional trading system. Other articles of export for western India included rice and wheat, iron and steel, and opium. Imports from South East Asia consisted of a variety of commodities: pepper, cloves, nutmeg, mace, tin, elephants, ivory and gold and silver bullion and specie. The Mughal ruling elite who, as noted earlier, had begun to participate in strength in the trade to West Asia, are also seen in the early seventeenth century to extend their interests to South East Asia. Ships belonging to the Imperial family began to appear in Acheh and Bantam in this period, and relations were forged between the ruling houses of the Mughal empire and those of the sultanates of Acheh and Bantam.

At first Cambay and later Surat had become a meeting point for the trade of South East Asia and West Asia. The flow of South East Asian pepper and spices through Acheh and Javanese ports on to Cambay, and then to West Asia and the Mediterranean, had been systematized in the sixteenth century, after a brief interlude by the Portuguese in the first three decades of that century. Events of the first half of the seventeenth century were to first interrupt and then cut that pepper and spice route, and seriously weaken Surat, the successor to Cambay, as the entrepôt of that route. But it took fifty to sixty years for it to be fully accomplished, and during that period there is evidence of the continuance, if only on a lower scale, of Gujarat's trade with South East Asia. We shall return to this in greater detail when discussing the major events in this process, and attempt to place on a time scale the gradual disappearance of this trade. It is sufficient now to make the point that in the first two to three decades the trade was still continuing and even flourishing. Gujarati ships sailing into Acheh, through what became known as the Surat Channel, traded both at that port and in the neighbouring port of Pase, and the west Sumatran ports of Baros and Priaman.

The coastal trade of Gujarat was a well established feature at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and in terms of volume was probably the largest among its trading sectors. It had expanded enormously in the sixteenth century, aided by the Portuguese entrenchment in Malabar and by the growth of Portuguese trade centres of Cochin and Goa. Indian Ocean trade, in an attempt to move away from areas of great Portuguese domination in south Malabar, reached northwards to Gujarat and Cambay/Surat. Thus by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Surat had become a source of export of Malabar and Kanara pepper, where Malabar and Kanarese traders were assured of getting the best prices for this and other Malabar commodities such as cardamom and ginger. With or without Portuguese cartazes, a growing volume of shipping plied between Surat and the Kanarese ports of Honavar, Batkal, and Basrur and Surat, and the Malabar ports of Cannanore, Calicut and Ponnani, besides the two Portuguese ports of Goa and Cochin. Even at the beginning of the seventeenth century the *kafila* of boats

from Malabar to Surat numbered 400 to 500, though the decline in numbers and volume was drastic after the 1630s. Cambay/Surat's connection with Calicut was particularly strong, both being outside the Portuguese system and desirous of maintaining their independent links with Indian Ocean trade. Surat's links with Portuguese trade through Goa and Cochin were also strong. The extent and significance of Gujarati trade with the east coast of India and with Bengal remains unclear. The links with Coromandel were probably minimal as there was no commercial justification for this trade to develop. Coromandel and Gujarat operated in different spheres of Indian Ocean trade, and it was only after the growth of Masulipatnam and its West Asian trade that these two regions begin to have some degree of overlap in their commercial interests. The same is true of Bengal, which does not look westwards in its trade; when it does, the initiatives appear to have been taken by Bengalis rather than by Gujaratis. There is little evidence of direct Gujarati sailings to Bengal in the early seventeenth century.

Into this trading world of coastal Gujarat was introduced an element of great instability and insecurity by the intrusion of two new European trading powers, the English and the Dutch. Over a period of about thirty years, the four parties involved—Mughal Gujarat, the Portuguese, the English and the Dutch—were engaged in a complex web of diplomacy, intrigue, conflict and reprisals that had an adverse impact on trade. The Mughals were the first state to have an interest in keeping the trade free and the sea routes open to their own merchants as well as to foreigners who chose to trade with them. While exercising full control over who was to be admitted to trade in their lands and to establish settlements for this purpose, the Mughals were unable to defend the entrances and exits to their ports from organized naval attack, even less were they able to defend their ships on the high seas, along the major sea routes. Yet the Mughals and their subjects had acquired a substantial merchant fleet of capital ships and small vessels carrying cargoes of great value in their long- and short-distance voyages. The Portuguese were already there, and the extent of their entrenched presence in Gujarat waters and along the sea routes traversed by Gujarati vessels has already been noted. The Dutch and the English made

their first appearance in Surat waters at about the same time. The Dutch East India Company sent its first expedition to Surat in 1607, and the English appeared there in 1609. From the first moments of contact there arose problems in relationships with the Mughals and with the Portuguese, which resulted in an intricate tangle of diplomacy and conflict that lasted for a few decades.

Both the Dutch and the English had to contend with intense and direct Portuguese opposition to their efforts to establish trade in Gujarat. The Mughals in the middle had their own interests to protect. They dearly welcomed the arrival of a force to counterbalance the dominance of the Portuguese on the waters, and bring about a weakening of this dominance. Yet they were not sure how far they could go in receiving these newcomers. Portuguese dominance was a major fact of maritime life, and the Mughals had come to an accommodation with it. The challenge of the newcomers introduced uncertainty into the situation and proved a test for Mughal statecraft and policy-making. Gujarati merchant and shipping interests were very concerned at any instability to maritime trade. They could not cope with changes to a system they had learned to live with, and out of which they were prospering.

The first Dutch Company servant to land in Surat and travel inland was embroiled in a conflict: he lost his life in an attack the Dutch believed was instigated by the Portuguese. The immediate reaction was to send a vessel to Mocha to take reprisals against Surat ships sailing there. The first English contacts followed a similar pattern. The English Company servants were unsuccessful in their initial attempts to establish trade in Gujarat, again, they believed, at the instigation of the Portuguese. The Portuguese were obstructing their shipping and trade in the Gulf of Cambay and in the forewaters of Surat, in every way. Their reaction, like that of the Dutch, was to proceed to the Red Sea and take reprisals against Indian shipping. Middleton seized several Gujarati ships, among them one belonging to the Mughal Queen Mother. In these very early conflicts the Mughals were coming out worst. The Portuguese began to attack Mughal ships for admitting the English and the Dutch; the English and the Dutch seized Gujarati ships for not allowing them to trade on terms similar to the Portuguese. In the

course of this conflict the Portuguese captured a Surat ship of great value belonging to the Queen. And so in 1614 there was a period of open warfare between them when the Portuguese plundered and burnt Broach and Goga along with a number of vessels anchored there. A total of fourteen ships, most of them probably coastal vessels, are said to have been destroyed in this attack. The Mughals countered with attacks on Portuguese trading posts, the seizure of goods and personnel, and a siege of Daman and Bassein. On the intervention of some Catholic priests a truce was patched up.

The Mughals were thus, in one way or another, subject to hostile action by all three European powers against their trade and shipping. These actions took place in an extensive area: in the forewaters of the Gujarat ports, at the entrances and exits of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and random attacks anywhere along the west coast of India. Portuguese passes, contrary to being guarantees of safe conduct, were invitations to English and Dutch attack, as the Dutch vigorously pursued their war against the Portuguese in the western Indian Ocean. The Dutch did not, and sometimes could not, distinguish between Portuguese shipping, Indian shipping with Portuguese interests, and totally Indian-owned shipping carrying Portuguese passes. On several occasions ships with Mughal financial interests were caught and the Dutch or the English would be called upon to account for it on land. On one of these raiding ventures the English ship's captain was instructed by his superiors to land his purser on any captured Indian ships, take a careful inventory of the goods on board, and check their ownership.

The Mughals were not without their own weapons in this confused conflict. Both the English and the Dutch desperately desired the right to settle trading factories and establish a regular trade in Mughal India, especially Gujarat. They wanted the best customs concessions they could negotiate. Once the two Companies had proved the point that they were not a negligible factor in the situation (an intense Portuguese propaganda had sought to convince the Mughals and the merchants of the opposite), but that on the contrary they could destabilize all seaborne trade, the Mughals moved quite willingly to grant them these concessions and attract them to establish factories in the country. They were encouraged

in this by the good account the navies of these two powers had given of themselves when confronting Portuguese armadas along the Gujarat coast. Thus by 1617 both the English and the Dutch had been permitted to establish factories in Surat and in the interior on broadly similar terms. This proved to be to Mughal advantage as the factories so founded by the two Companies and the consequent growing trade and investment made them hostages to Mughal fortunes, which the Mughals proceeded to utilize in pursuit of their commercial interests. Now unwritten rules of accommodation were evolved on the respective positions of the various parties. The Mughals had agreed to permit freedom of trade on the coast and in some specified inland markets. Some concessions were given on customs duties. In return the English and Dutch were to grant passes to Gujarati vessels and protect them from attack by the Portuguese. If they chose to prosecute their war against the Portuguese, this was to be directed against them alone and not against Indian vessels suspected of being in partnership with the Portuguese.

Whenever this was disturbed by the seizure of Gujarati vessels, retribution on land was swift against both powers. This happened a few times within years of the establishment of factories, and the inconvenience to trade that resulted was so great that all parties came to recognize the limits to their freedom of action. The Mughals knew that their shipping could be seized in Gujarat, the Red Sea or Persian Gulf, and the Dutch and English realized that their growing investments in Gujarat were at the mercy of the Mughals. These two powers realized how important it was to curry the favour of the Mughal state both at the central and at the local level. So they went further and freighted goods for Gujarati merchants in their own vessels. This was of particular advantage to the merchants when the Mughals were at war with the Portuguese. The English were seen to engage in freighting traffic more than the Dutch as they were, in the early years, short of capital and not well established in the Red Sea port of Mocha. The Dutch, whose operations were greater in volume, also reluctantly entered the freight traffic, not to be left behind by the English, for they saw that freighting goods of powerful Gujarati Muslim and Hindu

Banya merchants was a means of gaining influence with the elites of the land.

Another threat to shipping in these early decades of the seventeenth century was the appearance in these waters of interloping vessels of English trading interests attempting to break into the Company's monopoly, financed and supported by powerful men in England close to the Court. From 1615 to 1617, there were a few of these vessels plying between the Red Sea and the west coast of India, capturing trading vessels as prizes whenever they could. They waited near the straits of Bab-el-Mandib for rich Indian vessels coming out of Mocha, and along the Gujarat coast for vessels sailing out of the Gujarat, Sind and Bijapur ports. In 1616 these pirate ships seized Indian vessels just when the English were about to come to an accommodation with the Mughals. In 1617 a Company ship was able to save a large Mughal ship belonging to the Queen. Sir Thomas Roe, who was then on an embassy to the Mughal emperor, ordered Company ships to go looking for these pirate vessels, and in 1617 they caught two of these ships which they confiscated. The Mughals would have held the English Company responsible for any damage suffered at the hands of English pirates. With steps taken in England to deal with interlopers, this menace was put an end to for the time being, though it was to reappear periodically during the seventeenth century.

With the joint Anglo-Persian conquest of Hormuz in 1622 and the firm establishment of English and Dutch trade in Gujarat, there is a new phase in Gujarat's overseas westward trade. In the Red Sea, Mokha had replaced Aden as the trading emporium of the Red Sea. There was some instability in these parts in the early years of the century when the Zaidih Imams of Yemen were waging intermittent war against the Ottomans for control of this coast. They were eventually victorious and took Sana in 1628, Aden in 1630 and Mokha in 1636. As they took control of Mokha, they encouraged trade there and, after a brief interruption, the caravan and sea trade northwards along the Red Sea was resumed. Merchants from Suez, Aleppo and Constantinople here met the traders from India and East Africa. Mokha became a meeting point of the transcontinental trade and with the English and Dutch trying to enter the trade

from Gujarat this sector became a very competitive and rapidly expanding area in the first half of the seventeenth century.

With the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hormuz, Shah Abbas diverted trade to the mainland port of Gombroon, renamed Bandar Abbas. Hostilities with the Portuguese were ended by granting them the use of the port of Kung and the Persian Gulf was open to all shipping. The English had the initial advantage in the favourable position and the customs concessions they enjoyed in the country. But soon the Dutch were also admitted to the trade which became very competitive. Initially the Dutch and the English mainly carried out freighting trade of goods of Indian merchants. Soon Indian and European shipping to the Persian Gulf expanded and this became another growth sector of Gujarati trade. The English, Dutch and even the Portuguese were competing in the same commodities, both in the purchasing markets in Gujarat and further inland, as well as in the selling markets in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. As Portuguese claims for tribute on this trade were relaxed after the 1630s, Gujarati shippers secured greater freedom in this trade. The Portuguese were preoccupied with their conflict with the English and the Dutch, and the Mughals were able to bind these latter powers more towards the defence of shipping. Now and then when the Portuguese felt able to do so they would impose on Mughal shipping and take prizes on the seas, but retribution was swift—as was Mughal pressure on the English and the Dutch to protect their shipping.

With the relative security of the westward sea route there was an increase in Indian shipping, based mainly on Surat but also with Dabhul as a substantial seat of long-distance trade. There is seen an accelerated activity in ship-building and investment in overseas trade by the Mughal elite from the royal family downwards. The exports from Gujarat to Mokha consisted primarily in Indian textiles, cotton, indigo, tobacco, rice and wheat, Malabar pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, coir rope, and cloves, nutmeg and mace from South East Asia. In return the vessels brought back horses, almonds, raisins, ivory, dates, red dye, coffee and silver and gold specie of European and Turkish origin. This traffic was augmented from the early seventeenth century by the *haj* pilgrim traffic.

to Mecca, and the commercial nexus and the religious motivation became intertwined and spurred each other. It appears that the Mughal imperial family first entered shipbuilding to serve the *haj* traffic and then moved substantially into freight traffic and direct trade. The hundreds of devout *hajis* took with them small parcels of saleable goods to Mokha or Jedda or inland towns to pay for the expense of their trip.

The trade to the Persian Gulf ports consisted mainly of Indian textiles and cotton, indigo, rice and wheat from Sind and the interior, sugar from Bengal, Malabar pepper, cardamom, ginger, cinnamon and coconut produce, and nutmeg, cloves and mace from South East Asia. The imports to India consisted of horses, silk, dried fruit, rose water, wines and large quantities of Persian and European gold, and silver specie. The trade with Persia was subject to great fluctuation, depending on the state of stability of the northern and north-western frontier with the Ottoman empire. Indian goods to the Persian market came both through the land and sea routes and the volume of trade through the sea route depended on the safety of the land route. The Mughal/Safavid war in 1638–40 over Qandahar caused major interruptions to the land route; the sea route became popular and remained so for many years. Gujarati merchants had agents in Bandar Abbas and Basra and in the interior market towns upto Isfahan, where they were able to sell Indian textiles.

The large-scale trade between Surat or Dabhul and Mokha was in the hands of professional merchants operating independently or financed and supported by Mughal provincial officials of Gujarat and Sind. The Dabhul merchants were supported by powerful Bijapur officials—the Shahbandar of Surat and the governors of Gujarat, Ahmedabad and neighbouring territories emerged as leading exporters. But the real commercial expertise was in the hands of rising merchant families which expanded their operations. Powerful operators such as Mirza Muhamad, the Banyas Hari Vaisya and Virji Vohra, and the Armenian Khwaja Minaz, arose during this period. Most of their ships plied the westward trade and these houses had agents settled in major trade centres—Mokha, Jedda, Bandar Abbas, Basra, Muscat. From there they carried on

the shorter voyages within the region, from Mokha to Ethiopia and East African ports, Mokha and Bandar Abbas to Basra, and so on, lessening their dependence on the emporium or the one market which was subject to fluctuation.

There is no parallel evidence of the growth of Gujarati trade eastwards, nor can it be asserted that this trade was in the process of disappearing. Though there is no evidence of trade to the same volume as that to the west, the eastern trade was still alive, as some fortuitous evidence of the 1640s shows. The eastward sailings took place from Surat and Dabhul and the destinations in South East Asia were ports of the Melaka Straits and West Java. Dabhul shipping must have been carried out with Portuguese cartazes, and it is likely that these ships called at Melaka as well, which Surat ships do not seem to have done. The close relationship of Dabhul merchant interests with the Portuguese was well known to the Dutch who, in 1620, decided to declare these as enemy ships and make prizes of them on the high seas. The decision to drive these out of the trade to South East Asia was taken also because by then they were was found to be damaging to the Company's trade in these ports. Some years later (1625) this was held to be too harsh a measure which could create problems in western India, and it was decided to allow these ships to sail east of Cape Comorin provided they were not linked to the Portuguese and did not carry their goods in their ships.

Soon after the Dutch conquest of Malacca in 1641, there appears more evidence on Gujarati trading to South East Asia. Surat ships were sailing to Acheh, where Sultan Saffiyat al-Din (1641–75) was favourable to Indian trade. Princes Aurangzeb and Dara Shukoh were engaged in trade to Acheh. Aurangzeb exchanged presents with the sultan in 1641. Prominent Mughal merchants were engaged in this trade, as were Hindus such as Mohandas Nan. The Dutch observed several Surat vessels in Acheh, and in Johore, Perak and Kedah. Sometimes these vessels were equipped with passes from the three European powers—Dutch, English and Portuguese. These vessels imported Gujarati textiles, though they were in less demand than those of Coromandel, the finer varieties had a sale among the wealthier classes. The attractions on the return

journey were pepper, tin, elephants, gold and spices. Though the Dutch hold on the clove and nutmeg producing islands was increasing from the 1620s, it was still not total and exclusive. Considerable quantities went through to Macassar, the Javanese ports and eventually to Acheh. And it was here that the Gujaratis secured these prime commodities for their West Asian trade. Until around 1650 the Gujaratis were able to ship these spices to Surat, and the Dutch did not have full control of the market in these commodities until that time.

The initial reaction of the Dutch was to try and benefit from the arrival of these vessels in large numbers to the Melaka Straits area. They realized that this traffic was injurious to their own sales of Indian textiles. But the officials who took charge of Melaka thought they could attract these vessels to Melaka, where they could provide a variety of export goods demanded by these shippers. They knew that the Portuguese had attempted to control this traffic through the issue of passes. Their thoughts turned in a similar direction, particularly as they realized the impossibility of competing with Indians in these markets in the sale of Indian commodities. When their efforts to impose on the trade of Acheh through agreement with the ruler were unsuccessful, hostilities started and the port was blockaded. When this happened, a major change in policy towards Indian trade to South East Asia took place, beginning a period of conflict with Indian powers, especially the Mughal empire, over the freedom of Indian shippers to sail to the ports of the Melaka Straits.

The trade that suffered a substantial decline from the 1630s was the coastal *kafila* trade from Malabar to Goa to Surat under Portuguese protection. The Portuguese were no longer able to convoy this trade, with the appearance of annual armadas of the Dutch along these waters and the blockade of Goa during the trading season. By 1635 the number of ships in this *kafila* had gone down from three hundred to forty. Goa's major trade routes were thus disrupted, and with the removal of the threatening presence of the Portuguese it is likely that this coastal trade dispersed and was carried on from a number of centres on the way, with Surat as the great emporium from which the redistribution of import and

export goods took place. The English and the Dutch also began to break into this trade with trade settlements established on mid-points of this route, such as Rajapur, Wingurla and Bhatkal.

The steady growth of Gujarati trade received a setback with the great famine that raged in this province in 1630–1. The immediate effect in high price and scarcity of foodgrains had its impact across the whole spectrum of trade commodities. A general downturn in trade which had started around 1626 was accelerated by this famine. It was extremely difficult to secure textiles from the weaving villages where weavers dispersed in search of food and towards agricultural pursuits. Even where goods could be procured, these were at such high cost as to make trade unprofitable. Merchants had to go deep into the interior to procure goods, and when they did so it was difficult to get land transport over long-distances. Land caravans were greatly delayed by the difficulty of securing enough pack bullocks which could not be fed on the way. In 1631 a caravan carrying indigo from Ahmedabad to Surat was on the road for forty-seven days, on a journey which usually took fifteen to eighteen days. Scarcity increased brigandage on the roads. Two successive good harvests in 1633 and 1634 put Gujarat on the road to recovery, and by 1635 trade was picking up, weaving villages were repopulated, and goods became available.

As regular trade resumed, there appeared another major obstacle, this time resulting directly from Dutch ambitions towards eastern trade. Having successfully mastered the spice-producing islands of the Moluccas and conquered the strategic port of Melaka from the Portuguese, Dutch aims began to develop and expand further towards a mastery of all Indian Ocean trade. As noted above, on the conquest of Melaka in 1641 the Dutch realized the potential of the Indian trade to South East Asia as well as its intensely competitive character. Early attempts to maintain Melaka as a major emporium of the region were an immediate and dramatic failure. Even if they were to succeed in attracting Indian and Malayan/Sumatran trade to Melaka, it was clear that the benefits would not accrue to the Dutch. If they wanted to extend their restrictive trading methods to this region and engross the trade in the three major commodities—pepper, tin and textiles—they had

to use force to keep out Indian shipping and redirect trade from a number of regional ports, the most prominent being Acheh, to the Dutch-held port of Melaka.

Tentative steps to control Indian shipping, including that from Gujarat, to South East Asia by the issue of passes were begun from 1641. Here different sections of the vast Dutch enterprise spoke with different voices. The Dutch Governor of Melaka, appointed after its conquest, and his Batavian superiors, urged the use of this passes policy as a means to restrict the volume of shipping from Surat to Acheh and other ports and to redirect these sailings to Melaka. The intention was that then a watchful eye could be kept on these ships to control the commodities in which they traded and discriminatory tariffs could be imposed on them to favour Dutch trade in the region. Initially the tariff on imports and exports was set at ten per cent. The Governor of Melaka soon set about negotiating with rulers of the area to bind them by treaty to offer trade monopolies to the Dutch in vital commodities, such as pepper, tin and textiles. The Queen of Acheh could not be persuaded to make these concessions and a blockade of her ports was threatened to coerce her. Smaller rulers like the Raja of Kedah, the local Governor of Ujang Selang and Bangeri—both dependencies of the Thai kingdom—were coerced into signing such treaties. The treaty with the Raja of Kedah (June 1642) stipulated that ships from Surat, Bengal or any other Indian region coming to Kedah had to be provided with a Dutch pass. If, according to their passes, they had to touch at Melaka and had not done so, they were not to be given access to the Kedah river but sent to Melaka.

While this was the direction of policy of the Dutch officials in South East Asia, those in the Surat factory sang a different tune. Dutch trade in Gujarat had expanded enormously and Dutch officials of the factory had an interest in maintaining good relations with Mughal administration and prominent merchants. One of the ways to do this was to promise protection to Gujarat shipping by the issue of passes when requested, as the English were doing. Before the conquest of Melaka these passes had been freely granted. Gujarat trade to Acheh was growing with the decline of the Portuguese threat and was attracting the support of members of the imperial

family. Dutch officials in Surat urged that this practice be continued even after the conquest of Melaka, and they were faced with increased requests for such passes and even for the loan of Dutch pilots for their ships. When they received orders from Batavia in 1645 that passes to Acheh and the Malayan ports be given sparingly and on condition that these vessels call at Melaka to pay the Melaka taxes, it created enormous problems for these officials in their dealings with the Mughal administration.

When this policy was decided on, Dutch ships were cruising the approaches to Acheh, Johore, Melaka and Kedah, intercepting vessels to inspect their passes. Vessels which had not called at Melaka and paid customs dues there were directed to proceed to that port and released only after payment of these dues. In this way some Surat ships had been boarded and the nachodas forced to pay taxes—which they did under noisy and threatening protest. Agents of important shipowners such as the Governor of Surat and Princes Aurangzeb and Dara Shukoh made a great fuss over the passes granted to them and the conditions imposed, so that the Dutch Director of Surat had to waive these conditions in such cases. The Batavian government was adamant on the adherence to this policy and instructed that the ten per cent duty be collected from the ships before the passes were issued and ships departed from Surat. This created an even greater furore. Merchants and Mughal officials pointed to the anomalous situation in which the Dutch traded with customs concessions in Mughal territories but imposed high taxes on trade in lands which did not even belong to them. These restrictive measures had some effect and temporarily reduced Indian, and Gujarati, trade to Acheh and the Melaka Straits.

The dispute came to a head in 1648–9 when anger that had built up over the past four to five years erupted, and the merchants went on a deputation to the emperor. The Mughal officials of Surat also made representations on the damage done to the trade of the imperial family to South East Asia. In April 1648 the Governor of Surat stopped the loading of goods on to Dutch ships in Surat, sacked the Company's residence and seized cash and goods in compensation for the duties extorted on Mughal ships in Melaka. The Dutch decided to take firm action. An armada of six ships was

sent to cruise the Surat approach and seize vessels returning from Mokha in the season September to November. Also, ships anchored in Swally Bay and the Surat river were to be seized. The captured ships and treasure were to be used to bargain with the Mughals for an agreement granting the Dutch free trade in Surat and Bengal, as well as to extract a promise from the administration that all Indian shipping to Acheh, Perak, Kedah, Ujang Selang and Melaka was to cease. The fleet arrived before Surat at the end of October but the Mokha ships had already come in.

The following year another fleet was despatched to Surat with the same instructions. The fleet laid a blockade of the port and succeeded in capturing two large Mughal ships with a total cargo of Rs 1,600,000 in specie. The Governor of Surat immediately sued for peace. Both parties were to return the goods and money that had been captured. Emperor Shah Jahan had to issue a farman in which he confirmed existing trade privileges to the Dutch in his kingdom and agreed not to despatch vessels from Indian ports to Acheh or the Malay states. This prohibition, the Dutch insisted, was to stand till they had sorted out their differences with the sultanate of Acheh and received compensation for some losses they had suffered. When this happened, the governor-general of Batavia would inform the Surat authorities and then passes would be granted with certain stipulated conditions.

After a short respite the pressing demand for passes to South East Asian ports was resumed by Gujarati merchants, high administrative officials of Surat and Gujarat, and even by the emperor himself. The merchants threatened to send ships to Acheh with or without Dutch passes and challenged the Dutch to seize them and face the consequences in Surat. In 1651 the Governor of Surat, on being refused a pass for one of the emperor's ships to sail to Acheh, asserted that he would in any case send a ship to Acheh and, if it suffered any damage at Dutch hands, the emperor had the power to seek reparations in Gujarat. The merchants encouraged him in this defiance and wanted the emperor's support in breaking the Dutch blockade in Acheh and the Melaka Straits, while the Dutch continued to trade in Surat and the Mughal territories. The emperor put further pressure on the Dutch in 1653 by issuing a farman

instructing the Dutch to issue passes to any Indian ship wanting to sail to Acheh. The differences between the Dutch and Acheh had also been settled with a decision to share equally in the trade of the Acheh dependency of Perak, and in 1659 a treaty was signed between them. The blockade of Acheh had been progressively withdrawn and it had become clear to the Dutch authorities of Melaka that Asian trade could not be forced into that port by these means. The Batavian government, which had been a keen proponent of the policy of using force to cut the India–South East Asia trade, also realized that the policy had several ramifications in the Indian subcontinent, where Dutch trade was expanding rapidly in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. It seemed foolish to jeopardize this growth for uncertain returns in the Melaka Straits region.

By 1660 it was recognized that the policy of forbidding Indian, including Gujarati, shipping to South East Asia was a failure. The Dutch began to issue passes in Surat without restrictions to Acheh, Perak, Kedah and even to Batavia, Macau and Ayuthya. This was found to be a means to keep on the good side of the Mughal government of the port and province, as indeed it was, and close links were forged with merchant interests of Surat. This resumption of the trade to South East Asia came at a time of a further expansionary spurt in Gujarati and Mughal shipping in Surat. It appears that this expansion embraced South East Asia as well, and counters the current view in historiography of Indian commerce that Gujarati trade to South East Asia tended to dry up after the 1660s and all the concentration thereafter was on the westward trade. While there is no denying that in its scale the westward trade was much greater than that to South East Asia, there is clear, though broken, evidence of the trade to South East Asia continuing into the last decade of the seventeenth century.

Gujarati trade to South East Asia continued to be primarily focussed on Acheh where, as noted above, friendly relations were established with the Achenese ruling house. After the 1660s the Dutch abandoned any attempt to control this trade. The Gujaratis had the advantage of English support for this trade, freely providing passes and even pilots and specialist crew for their ships. The main

elements of the trade continued without change, with one exception. Pepper, tin, elephants, ivory, benjamin, aloe wood, other soft woods and gumlak were the chief items of import. Exported to Acheh were mainly Gujarati textiles, rice, wheat, sugar from Bengal and a variety of produce originating from West Asia. The one exception was that the spices (cloves, nutmeg, mace) no longer appear among the cargo. By 1660 the Dutch had been pretty successful in sealing off any leakage of spices from the producing islands and became the sole carriers of these goods to Surat. However, the cutting of access to this category of goods does not seem to have seriously disadvantaged the trade to Acheh so as to cause its stoppage. It appears that historians of the previous period may have exaggerated the significance of the spice trade in the western India–South East Asia exchange.

Acheh was not the only port to which Gujarati ships sailed. They went to Johore, Perak and Kedah, and through the Straits to Bantam and further east to Macassar. There is evidence of continuous sailing to these ports in the second half of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the volume was not great, but the trade was continuous. With the growth of Macassar and Bantam as important trade centres outside Dutch control, Gujarati sailings to these ports showed some increase. Here Gujarat's interests had the assistance and protection of the English, who developed a flourishing trade with Bantam. In both places there were contacts with the rulers and state officials, especially in Bantam. The Islamic connection was strong with all these states and the Gujarati merchants facilitated the prosecution of the *Haj* pilgrimage by members of the ruling family. A prince of Bantam took passage in 1675 in a Gujarati vessel to Surat, and then on to Mecca, on pilgrimage, accompanied by a large retinue. The Sultan of Bantam, a great trader himself, had continuing trade with Surat where he had Parsi brokers to whom he consigned goods. In 1678–81 there is evidence of considerable movement of ships from Surat to Bantam. When in the early 1680s the Dutch moved against Bantam and blockaded the port, among vessels seized were some from Gujarat.

The trade to these ports was rather similar to the trade to Acheh, with pepper, tin, elephants, aromatic woods and gums featuring in

the export trade and textiles as the major import. The Javanese market had always been a good one for Indian textiles and though Gujarati textiles were not in such great demand as those of Coromandel, the fine and embroidered weaves were in demand among the upper classes. There was also the chance of getting some cloves and nutmeg that slipped through the strict Dutch cordon, at least before the Dutch conquest of Macassar in 1663. There is also some evidence of Gujarati shipping to Manila from the 1660s, from Bantam and Macassar. The final collapse of this trade would have been after the Dutch conquest of Bantam in 1684. Acheh had gone into decline at about the same time because of internal political strife. There was some Gujarati trade to Burmese and Thai ports, especially Tenasserim, Pegu and Ayuthya. It is possible that this trade link was forged through Masulipatnam, which had strong connections with the Burmese/Thai ports on one side and with Surat on the other.

To resume the discussion of the overseas trade of Gujarat in its totality, there seems general agreement that the second half of the seventeenth century was a period of steady, continuing growth in all the sectors of trade. The growth was most marked in the westward sector, steady in the coastal north/south trade, and at least maintaining a level rate in the eastward trade to eastern India and South East Asia. There was, of course, a rapid growth in the trade of the Dutch and the English. The trade across the Arabian Sea to the ports of the Persian Gulf, southern Arabia and the Red Sea was the foundation of Surat's prosperity and the mainstay of the merchants. A variety of groups entered it. There were the old Gujarati Muslim merchant families of diverse origins but now domiciled in Gujarat, who had enlarged their operations in ship-owning and entrepôt trade across regions. These merchants had eastward and westward links and used Surat as an entrepôt for this inter-regional trade. Then there were the rich and powerful Hindu and Jain Banya families who engaged both in land-based brokerage for wholesale trade and were ship-owners engaged in overseas trade. They tended to favour the southern trade to Malabar, Konkan and to Coromandel and Bengal as well as the South East Asian trade. A third group was the Mughal noble families holding high administrative posi-

tions in Gujarat and neighbouring provinces. This group used its undoubted power and access to resources as well as the surplus wealth that they enjoyed to invest and participate in trading. They became ship-owners and were in partnership with the wealthier merchants. Finally, there was the Mughal royal family which began to participate extensively in overseas trading in the middle decades of the seventeenth century.

This imperial participation is a distinct phenomenon of this period and affected India's maritime trade in different ways. It extended from the emperor himself (Shah Jahan was a major participant in shipping), to the queen, princes and princesses of the realm. From 1640, for over a twenty-year period, there was brisk activity in ship-building in the dockyards of Gujarat ports on the orders and for the ownership of members of the imperial family. These were generally big ships of upto 1000 tonnes, generally among the biggest in Gujarat, and sailed the long-distance routes to Bandar Abbas, Mokha, Acheh and Bantam. It appears that these ventures started off with a primarily religious motivation. They were to satisfy the demand among their subjects and provide opportunities for undertaking the *haj* to Mecca. Soon they expanded into commercial enterprises, engaging both in the purchase and sale of commodities on the owners' behalf as well as in a lucrative freighting traffic to these major ports. By the former, the ruling families were able to secure for their consumption luxury commodities from the Islamic lands so as to imitate the life-styles of powerful Islamic potentates like the Ottomans and the Safavids. By engaging in the freight trade, the royals provided valuable shipping space at a time of expanding commerce, enabling several small and middling traders of Gujarat and the coastal regions to participate in trade by shipping small quantities of goods to and from West Asian markets.

The great demand for freight traffic is seen in the fact that the English and the Dutch entered it in a big way, the English from the very outset, the Dutch more reluctantly when they were not doing so well in West Asian markets. The Dutch, English and Mughal ships for a time were in competition for freight traffic. The Dutch and the English had the advantage of providing security

against piracy and the better reputation their ships had in the Indian Ocean. The Mughals would use their political authority to get an advantage by ordering merchants to freight with them or by denying English and Dutch ships permission to load goods of merchants on freight before their own ships were full. This competition for freighting went on to the 1660s when the Dutch, on orders from their superiors, opted out of it and English trade began to improve.

Another beneficial effect of imperial and state participation in sea-borne trade was the political and military support this gave to trade in times of crises and external threats. There were three phases of crises to Gujarat's sea-borne commerce in the seventeenth century. The first was during the first three decades, when it became entangled in European commercial rivalry fought out on the Indian Ocean. The second was in the 1640s when the Dutch sought to replace the Portuguese as controllers and arbiters of Asian trade. The third was in the 1680s and 1690s when European piracy constituted a serious threat to the westward trade of Gujarat and embroiled the two European trading powers in conflict with the Mughal empire. In all these crises, the overwhelming power of the Mughals on land and the advantages they held by their control of the land's resources told in the end and forced European powers to come to an accommodation with the Mughals. This kept the trade of the subcontinent free through most of the century.

Beneficial as the effects of Mughal participation in trade were, there were also its negative aspects where political power was used to coerce trade in favour of the political participants. This occurred to a great extent in Gujarat throughout the seventeenth century. The profits accruing from trade were great; correspondingly the urge to use force in one's favour was also great. This happened both on the initiative of the emperor and those close to him as well as through the actions of regional authorities acting in their own private interests. The emperor as well as provincial rulers occasionally declared monopolies in specific articles of commerce. The use of coercion in favour of the freight traffic of imperial ships was noted above. There were examples of the Surat port authorities forbidding the loading of Dutch and English vessels before the royal vessels were full. Similarly, when the royal vessels were collecting goods to

be shipped to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, merchants supplying private and Company trade would not be allowed access to some weaving villages. Such action was also taken to shut out competitive purchase of indigo when the royal vessels had to be supplied with indigo for the West Asian market.

European investment gave a great boost to Gujarat trade in the seventeenth century. The Portuguese were never major participants in this trade and, after the decline of Diu and the weakening of their naval presence, their share of the trade was negligible. The major feature of European enterprise was the great growth in English and Dutch trade in Gujarat in the seventeenth century. The English, after a slow start, gradually strengthened their trade, and after the 1660s their investment grew. From the 1670s they were exporting goods to the value of one to two million rupees. Their major exports were textiles, indigo and cotton, but indigo was less in demand in Europe in the latter part of the century and they concentrated on textiles and cotton. The English, because of their lack of capital in the first half of the seventeenth century, became promoters of Gujarat's trade to West Asia and later to South East Asia. Soon after the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hormuz in alliance with Persia, the English utilized their position in Surat and in Bandar Abbas to encourage this trade. Likewise, they promoted the trade to Mokha. A great deal of freighting of goods of Gujarati merchants to the Persian Gulf and to the Red Sea was done in their vessels. In addition, the Company was engaged in its own trade to Persia and Mokha. In Persia the Company was expanding its silk purchases and using, as far as possible, Indian goods to finance these purchases. English imports into Gujarat were of no great consequence. They sold goods brought from Europe, such as woollens, copper, lead, zinc and mercury, but never anywhere near the value of their exports from Gujarat. This gap had always to be made up with bullion imports from Europe.

The single most distinctive feature of commercial developments in Gujarat in the seventeenth century was the trade of the Dutch East India Company. Despite some adverse early effects, largely resulting from a Dutch misreading of the nature of Asian trade in the Indian Ocean, the Dutch soon settled down to trading in the

Indian subcontinent as another competitor. In Gujarat, Dutch trade expanded steadily and leapt forward in the second half of the seventeenth century. The Dutch utilized Surat firstly as a trading post to secure goods for their European trade. In this trade they invested heavily in Gujarat textiles of different varieties, indigo and saltpetre. They then went on to use Surat as a centre for their trading operations within Asia. They purchased goods in Surat for circulation in markets in other regions of Asia. Finally, they used Surat as an entrepôt for the distribution of imports within India and to other parts of Asia. Thus for the Dutch, Gujarat was an important link in their Europe–Asia as well as their inter-Asian trade.

As Dutch exports from Gujarat increased, they, like the English, had to face upto the question of purchasing power to finance these imports. Goods brought from Europe did not amount to much in value, and large quantities of bullion had to be brought from the Netherlands. But unlike the English, the Dutch were developing a trade network in South East Asia and securing access to important commodities in inter-Asian trade exchanges. They were able to bring cloves, mace and nutmeg for sale in Surat, which, till the middle of the seventeenth century, they sold in competition with Indian traders who were themselves trading to South East Asia. Somewhat later they had access to pepper and tin, which also they sold in Surat in competition with Indians. But soon other circumstances intervened to enable the Dutch to vastly increase their earnings from the import trade to Surat. The favourable situation they had secured in relation to the Japanese trade enabled them to have virtual monopoly access to Japanese copper. This bar copper from Japan proved extremely popular in India, which was then suffering a dearth in coins of small denomination. Surat proved a great market for copper and, from the 1650s, annual sales of copper in Surat brought by the Dutch grew from around 50,000 Dutch pounds to about between 600,000 to 900,000 pounds in the 1670s and 1680s, rising to a high of 1,265,310 pounds in 1684. These sales brought returns of a maximum of about Rs 400,000 a year. A second favourable turn of events was the successful monopolization of the supply of cloves, mace and nutmeg which enabled the Dutch to be the sole suppliers of these commodities in India.

Surat was the chief market for these spices in Asia, and in the second half of the seventeenth century the Dutch were able to fix prices on these commodities and control the supply. Under strict control from the Netherlands, the Asian price was progressively increased, reflecting the market domination of the Dutch. The price of cloves was increased from 48 Dutch Stuivers a pound in 1653, when there was a competitive market, to 87 Stuivers in 1687 and 100 Stuivers in 1697. Nutmeg was increased from 30 to 33 St. in 1653, to 72 St. in 1692, and mace from 70 St. in 1653 to 160 St. in 1697.

Copper and the various spices gave the Dutch an important weapon in prosecuting trade in Gujarat. During the first three decades they had paid for their purchases mainly through imported silver. As their import trade stabilized in the second half of the seventeenth century, there was less reliance on imported bullion. On these staple commodities they were able to profit between Rs 500,000 to Rs 800,000 a year. Though they were never completely free from the necessity to import bullion from Europe into Surat, this was substantially reduced in the latter part of the century. It should be noted, of course, that the volume of Dutch exports from Gujarat to Europe and to other parts of Asia was constantly expanding. During very successful years of import trade they were able to send silver out of Surat to Bengal, to finance their purchases there. As importers of copper and silver, the Dutch played an important role in the province's monetary system, something Mughal authorities were well aware of, and which influenced their relations with Dutch officials of Surat.

European trade competed directly with Indian trade in West Asian markets. In the early phase, Gujarat's merchants wanted to avoid this competition and used their influence with the Mughal administration to discourage English and Dutch trade, especially their direct sailings from Surat to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. When the English and the Dutch won this right after a show of force, there was a period of intense competition in these markets during the 1630s and 1640s. English, Dutch and Gujarati merchants were competing in Mokha and in Persian ports for the sale of Indian textiles and, initially, South East Asian spices. This increase in volume of trade soon glutted the markets there. Prices fell

and profit ratios declined, and the Companies found that they could not sustain the trade. The Dutch felt this most as their establishment overheads in Surat were large, though they compensated for the low profits in textiles by the high profits they enjoyed on spices. The Dutch were the first to slowly opt out of the westwards trade. The English continued longer because of their closer involvement in Persia and the great demand for Persian silk in their domestic market. On those occasions, where evidence is available of relative volumes of trade, it has been estimated that Europeans carried between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the total textile exports from Surat to West Asia. The Companies quite clearly could not compete with Gujarati trade in what was its strongest sector.

The trade of Indians based in Gujarat continued to flourish in the second half of the seventeenth century. After the difficulties of the 1640s, there was stability and growth till the 1680s, when other problems arose. It appears that Surat attracted to itself the shipping and trade of neighbouring ports, those once controlled by the Portuguese (Daman, Bassein), and of Dabhul which lost its long-distance trade. As noted above, the imperial family initiated a programme of shipbuilding in the 1640s and added to the volume of shipping. It is not clear what effect this had on the trade of the private sector. Private Gujarati shipping continued in unequal competition with imperial ships. Sometime in the early 1660s Aurangzeb put an end to this imperial construction and ownership of ships: it is not clear for what reason. One speculation is that influential Gujarati merchants made representations to the emperor that this activity was damaging their own trade. Private shipping now expanded without any restrictions. It seems that while the imperial ships were large in size, around 1000 tonnes, the ships of private merchants were of medium size, probably from 200 to 500 tonnes, and became the standard type of Indian Ocean long-distance ships. The size of the large merchant fleet in Surat is often commented on by travellers and Company officials in Surat. One estimate is that the Surat fleet consisted of about a hundred ships.

Gujarat's trade to West Asia was a major source of bullion to the province and neighbouring regions. The returns on the exports to these markets were brought back, to a great proportion, in specie

of gold and silver. Merchants from the west and the north brought specie to ports like Mokha, Bandar Abbas and Basra from the eastern Mediterranean, north Africa and Europe. Thus, Indians were paid for their goods in silver reals, Rix dollars, abbasis, European and Ottoman ducats, larines, rupees and a variety of other coins. Ships that were seized by Europeans in various periods throughout this century, returning from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, were found to contain specie to the value of between Rs 900,000 and 1,200,000. Therefore, the sea-borne trade to West Asia must have been a vital source of bullion to India. This may in part explain the efforts Mughals went to in keeping this trade open and, for brief periods, investing in shipbuilding so as to provide carrying capacity in order to increase the volume of trade.

To facilitate this expanding trade activity, Surat developed a variety of institutions and mechanisms which were largely based on traditional practices and now adapted to cope with the increased scale of transactions. Surat developed as an important financial centre of Mughal India. European companies found little difficulty in borrowing money in large quantities and annual interest rates were reasonable at 6 per cent to 12 per cent for long-term secure loans. Short-term rates fluctuated, depending on the availability of capital, and could be as high as 1.5 per cent per month. In the second half of the seventeenth century, interest rates seem to have fallen to around 4 per cent to 5 per cent, reflecting a greater availability of money in and around the port, generated by the flourishing overseas trade and the influx of bullion. Even the Dutch, with their superior capital resources and their successful import trade, and of course the not so well endowed English, were constantly tapping the Surat capital market for their textile investments. From much of the discussion above on the participation of Mughal ruling classes in commerce, it will be clear that capital was coming into commerce from land revenue. The members of the imperial family and prominent administrators were using revenues accruing from landholdings in the pursuit of commerce. These controllers of revenue would lend money to merchants and bankers for their activities. Thus, the Surat financial markets were constantly supplied with capital from which all minor and major participants in

commerce drew. In the great demand for capital and credit that the commercial system generated, there was participation from a variety of sources: the Mughal imperial family, administrators and grantees of revenue, merchants, shroffs.

Also important was the development of facilities to transfer money across long-distances. The trade in capital and the provision of facilities to transfer money became specialized functions undertaken by people who did not generally trade in commodities. Indeed it was the preserve of Hindu and Jain Banyas based in Gujarat with networks spread into the interior through kinfolk and agents. European and Indian merchants made use of these facilities to transfer money for purchases made in interior markets. Thus, vast sums of money had to be sent for textiles and indigo to the producing areas as advances. From Surat there were regular transfer facilities to Cambay, Broach, Baroda and Ahmedabad for textiles, and further on to Agra and Sironj for indigo. The transfer took place both ways, from Surat to these places for the purchase of goods and from these places to Surat, of money realized from the sale of goods. Shroffs integrated the transfer of money for commercial purposes with the transfer of revenues by the administration and the imperial treasury from one district to the other.

The hinterland of Surat's trading kept expanding in the seventeenth century. In the early part the main sources of goods for export was the weaving villages in the immediate neighbourhood. The weaving villages of Cambay, Broach, Baroda and upto Ahmedabad developed a tradition of providing goods for export to Asian and European markets. Here the weaving industry was concentrated and relatively urbanized, unlike many other parts of India and it was more convenient for merchants to place large-scale orders and ensure delivery on time. With increasing competition from European and Asian trade, heavy demands were placed on these producers and prices began to increase. The great famine of 1630–3 saw the dispersal and depopulation of a number of these weaving villages. The Dutch and the English, who made bulk orders for the staple varieties, began to move further inland in search of goods. Their agents went north-eastwards to Malwa, Agra and Awadh, and in the second half of the seventeenth century goods were coming

to Surat from these places. In appears that Bengal goods were also coming to Surat through this land route. In this way silk and sugar for the trade to Arabia and Persia was procured by Indian merchants. These inland routes were vital for the transport of import goods that came in through Surat. Goods from West Asia that were part of an Islamic consumption pattern were distributed through these routes. The imperial cities of Agra and Delhi were major consumers of these goods. When the Dutch became sole carriers of spices, they had to transport spices from Surat to these markets, which were their major consumers.

Other trade routes linked Surat with Sind northwards, to major cities there, such as Multan and Lahore. It appears that in the course of the seventeenth century direct overseas trade from the ports of the Indus estuary declined. This made Surat the major port of export for Sind, especially its rice and wheat, which had a demand in West Asia and rice in South East Asia. Also some of the textiles produced in Sind were suitable for West Asia. There also appears to have been an inland trade linking Surat with the Deccan. The market towns of Burhanpur and Indore, and further on to Hyderabad/Golconda, were places where Surat imports could be marketed. It is also likely that textiles produced in the eastern districts were taken by land to Surat for export.

The land routes were subject to brigandage and attacks on the way, and there is evidence that this was always a problem, at some times more acute than at others. During and after the Gujarat famine (1630–3), for example, the roads around Ahmedabad and Multan were most dangerous. Generally the Mughal state had the situation well under control. The Rajput tribes of the upper Gujarat frontier were the most troublesome. Provincial governors provided escorts for major caravans. Merchants themselves organized and purchased protection for their *kafilas.* Both the Dutch and the English arranged for security of their own goods which were often very costly. Mughal authorities also provided adequate protection for European caravans. When there was an attack, it was the responsibility of the administrator of the territory where it took place to pursue the attackers and recover the stolen goods. The return of stolen goods was treated as a matter of honour by the

Mughal administration. Protection within the port-city was also very stringent and, apart from external attacks by the Marathas against which no defence was possible, law and order in Surat and its major routes were well maintained.

The large amount of business generated by the English and the Dutch created opportunities for commodity brokerage and supply agencies, into which a number of Gujarati merchants moved. These brokers and suppliers tended to come from the Hindu and Jain Banyas and Parsis. They handled the bulk of the companies' orders for textiles and indigo, for which they took advances from them and also put in their own money. The profits from this were good and relatively risk-free. There was also the import business of the Companies, especially the Dutch, whose import trade expanded enormously in this period. The wholesale purchase of Dutch copper and spices was engaged in by these commodity brokers, who then enjoyed a powerful position in the resale of these goods in the interior. Sometimes there was political interference in the sale of these commodities, and administrative officials would insist on a commission in return for allowing these merchants to trade in these commodities. In time a few merchants succeeded in establishing a continuing domination of the Dutch import business and were able to manipulate wholesale and retail prices in these commodities. Dutch higher authorities suspected that the Surat officials of the Company were in collusion with these merchants, who conspired to depress prices and kept others out of the market. The usual method of sale of commodities was by auction in the factory. It was known as Japanese auction in which a certain number of merchants were invited to the factory to view the goods and deliver secret bids on pieces of paper unknown to others. The highest bid was selected. The Dutch superiors in Batavia and Amsterdam noted that a small group of merchants was able to dominate the purchase annually. They suspected that the Dutch factors in Surat were revealing the bids to certain merchants favoured by them, who then bid fractionally more and got control of the commodities. They attempted to break this hold and instructed that a more open process be adopted, and that everyone be permitted to appear at these sales. In spite of these efforts, the domination of the market

in particular commodities by a few individuals could not be avoided. Thus, Virji Vohra was for many decades in control of the largest share of the trade in spices in Surat.

In their dealings in commodities within the country, the Dutch and the English preferred to deal with Hindu and Jain Banyas rather than with Muslims. They feared that the influence Muslim merchants had with the provincial administration and with the court might impede them from getting justice in case of dispute. There were times when officials such as the governor and shahbandar of the port had sought to buy large quantities of goods from the Europeans. They were generally very wary about sales to these people. They experienced delayed payments, discounting on the grounds of poor quality. So they always insisted on freedom to contract with any merchant who offered himself and had this right written into farmans they secured from the Emperor. Even when borrowing in the money market, Europeans preferred to deal with Banyas rather than with Muslims, and both companies directed their officials not to borrow money from Mughal officials, though this did happen now and then.

In the last years of the seventeenth century, when Gujarati trade to all parts of Asia was well in place and flourishing, it faced another crisis of safety and instability caused by the Europeans. It began with a renewed outbreak of European piracy in the approaches to the Red Sea and the western Indian coast. At the same time, there were a number of disputes that broke out between the English and the Mughals in Surat and in Bengal over customs duties and the free transit of goods. Pirate vessels originating from Europe or fitted out from the West Indies, with a largely English crew and sometimes flying English colours, appeared in the Indian Ocean. In 1686 these pirate vessels captured and plundered Surat ships in the Red Sea. The emperor took reprisals on the English in Surat, holding them responsible. The English declared war on the Mughals and attacked Mughal ports and shipping in Bengal. In Gujarat they seized a number of vessels which they took to Bombay. They blockaded Mokha and Basra, plundering a number of Indian vessels trading there. The Mughals counterattacked the English in Bombay through the Mughal Admiral Sidi Yakut Khan. The war went on

till 1690, and Gujarati merchants suffered great losses during this period. Finally, peace was restored, with the emperor granting a farman of free trade in February 1690 and the English agreeing to compensate for as well as return seized goods and vessels.

Threats from piracy grew enormously after 1693. English interlopers, disregarding the Company's monopoly after the 1688 Revolution, equipped voyages to the east and ended up as pirates, seeing the ease with which rich Indian ships plying between western India and West Asia could be pillaged. A large pirate ship appeared in the Red Sea in 1695 and seized several ships. Some of the most valuable ships of rich Surat merchants were taken. In September 1695 it seized a ship belonging to the wealthy Surat merchant Abdul Ghaffur. Somewhat later the imperial ship, *Ganj-i-Sawai*, returning from Mokha, was captured between Bombay and Daman, with treasure reputed to amount to fifty-two lakhs of rupees. Another Surat ship was captured off the Sind coast. The damage done to Surat trade was estimated at about fifty lakhs of rupees. Gujarati merchants were terrified, and all trading was suspended, affecting the economy of Gujarat greatly. The emperor was concerned at the interruption of the *haj* pilgrim traffic. The merchants, led by Abdul Ghaffur, made representations to the emperor.

The emperor at first held the English responsible. He seized the English president and all the English officials of Surat and Broach, and had them put in irons. The Court of Directors and the company in London offered rewards for the capture of the privateer, Captain Avery. The Dutch tried to take advantage of this opportunity and offered to escort Indian vessels, in return for exclusive trading privileges in the empire, an offer the emperor rejected out of hand. He now held all these European powers trading in Gujarat—English, Dutch and French—jointly responsible for the safety of Indian shipping in the Arabian Sea. He wanted them to compensate the merchants for their losses and to sign a bond standing guarantee against robbery on ships by Europeans. When the three powers disagreed, he required them to sign three separate bonds. The Dutch would provide two ships to a convoy and would be responsible for the safety of the seas upto Mokha. The English would provide two ships to a convoy and be responsible for the safety of shipping from

Surat along the Malabar coast and eastwards. The French would provide one ship and be responsible for the safety of shipping in the Persian Gulf.

The Dutch, who did not want to see their lucrative Surat trade interrupted, signed the bond and provided two ships which escorted the Red Sea merchant fleet in 1696 and 1697. There were still problems when some Indian ships strayed from the convoy or lagged behind and were caught. As the Dutch were held responsible for any losses, they tightened up procedures and secured a bond from the agents of the shippers that their ships would sail under the Dutch captain's orders. Also, one or two Dutchmen were to be placed on each of the ships to control the sailing. The Mughal government promised to pay for the expenses of these Dutch convoy ships, which was to be deducted from the tolls on Dutch exports. Likewise, the English offered two ships for convoy duties to the Red Sea. The French also made a token contribution. This went on till 1701, and still there were ships being pirated which had strayed from the convoy. The Mughal administration held the Dutch responsible for these losses and seized Dutch goods in their inland factories. The Dutch had to threaten a blockade of Surat before the matter was settled.

A less important but more persistent threat to Gujarati shipping came from Malabar pirates and the Maratha navy. Malabar pirates made bold and daring ventures northwards to Gujarat and Sind, mainly hugging the coast and seizing coastal vessels. There had been occasions when they had attacked Dutch and English vessels. The Maratha navy used to harass Mughal shipping as part of Shivaji's war against the Mughals. It was to cope with these threats that the Mughals brought the Sidis of Zanzibar into their service, to develop a Mughal navy to protect coastal shipping.

The Gujarat region was the busiest and most active trading region of India in the seventeenth century. Its port of Surat handled arguably the highest volume of commercial traffic among Indian Ocean ports. The Gujarat coast and its ports served the vital function of outlets for a large part of continental India. They were

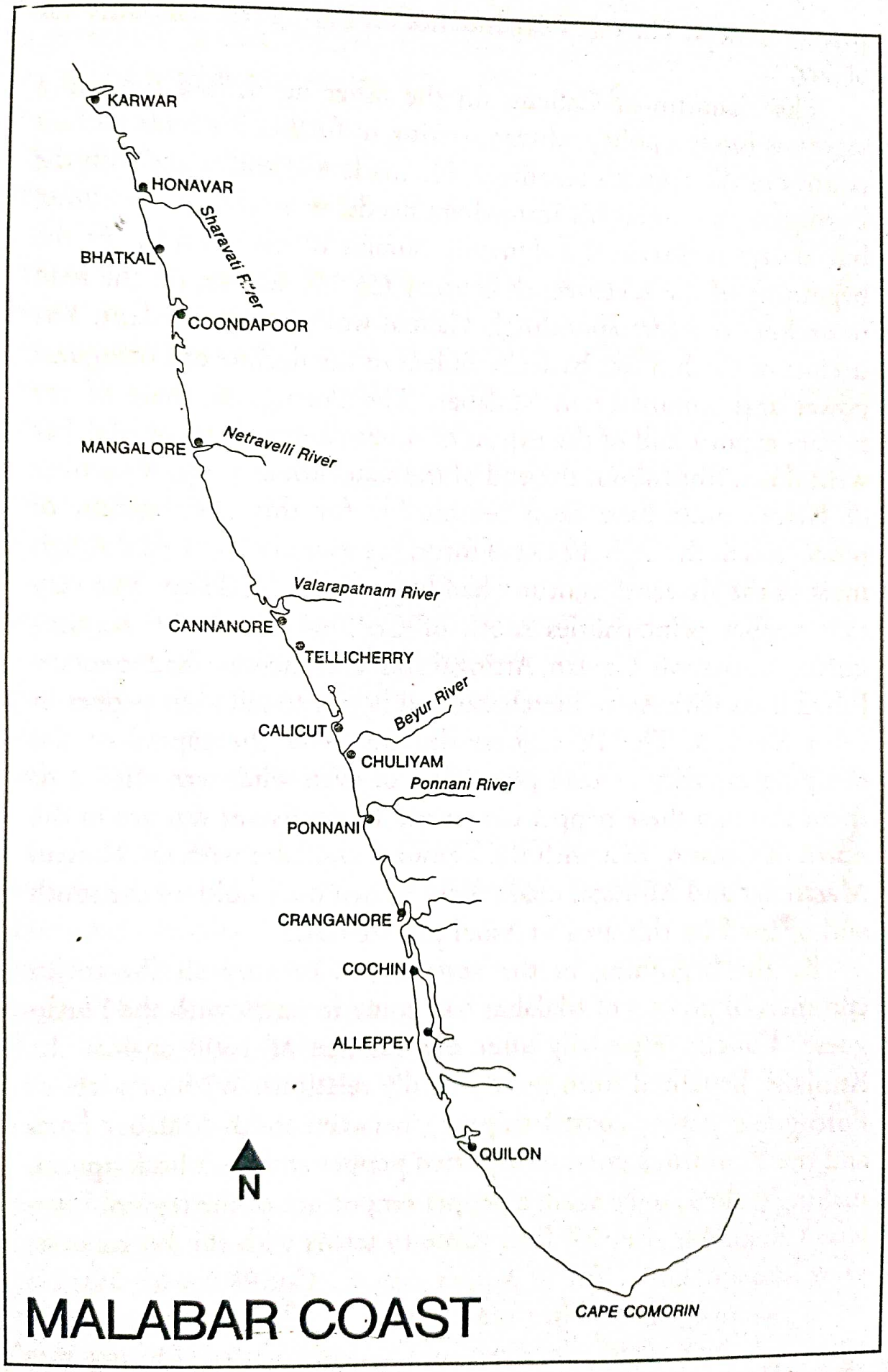
important links of the subcontinent with the Indian Ocean. The region had as the foundation of its strength the integration of the three powerful Islamic states and economies of the period—Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal. It stretched its arms eastwards to other parts of the Indian Ocean. It was an important sector in the growing coastal trade of western India. Gujarat possessed the political and administrative infrastructure to facilitate this trade. There developed a nexus between leaders of administration and leaders of commerce. The most powerful assemblage of merchant entrepreneurs developed in this region. They possessed a degree of commercial expertise which was among the most advanced in the Indian Ocean trading world. These solid foundations enabled Gujarat to achieve a continuity in its trading operations in the seventeenth century, and to tide over political and economic crises that appeared from time to time. At the end of the century, this region had the strongest export and import trade, shipping and merchant entrepreneurship in the Indian subcontinent.

4

The Trade of Malabar and Kanara

In the seventeenth century, the Malabar coast was traumatized by European rivalry and European penetration, and this to a degree far exceeding any other part of the Indian subcontinent. The vulnerability of Malabar's trading port-states and principalities was clearly demonstrated, and the focus of power and control of events passed even more decisively towards the coast than it had in the sixteenth century. In discussions of the legacy of the sixteenth century it was argued that while Malabar and Kanara were drawn into the orbit of the Portuguese system and its *Estado*, these two trading regions succeeded in retaining a role in the traditional Asian trading system, even enhancing this role towards the end of the century. Though in 1600 the stronghold of the Kunjali Maraikkar, the Kottai at Pudupattinam, was stormed and seized by the combined attack of the Portuguese and the Zamorin, and Kunjali taken prisoner and executed in Goa, it was by no means the end of Malabar Muslim maritime power or of their commercial activities. The Maraikkar dispersed to other ports along the coast, regrouped and made peace with the Zamorin to continue their commerce.

Apart from this important event, which freed the Zamorin of Calicut from the dominance of Maraikkar naval interests, a century of Portuguese penetration of the Malabar coast had done little to permanently alter the balance of power or the direction of commerce. Portuguese protection of the Raja of Cochin had saved the kingdom from destruction but maintained it in a state of subordination and dependence on Portuguese military power. No doubt the port and city of Cochin had grown at the expense of Calicut. Its growth and prosperity were artificial, incorporated into the Portuguese *Estado*, and predominantly a centre of Portuguese settlement. The Portuguese city itself grew as the centre of officialdom and the Church, with stately public buildings and mansions for



Map 2 Malabar

private settlers. The raja's dependence on Portuguese handouts was abject.

The Zamorin of Calicut, on the other hand, had pursued a vigorous foreign policy, always seeking to further his trade and his control of the region's resources. He made war and peace with the Portuguese as suited his immediate needs, won and lost territory, but always maintained a dynamic pursuit of his interests. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Cochin was set on the road to decline, and correspondingly Calicut was on the ascendant. The decline of Cochin was basically linked to the decline of Portuguese power and commerce in Malabar. The Portuguese share of the pepper exports and of the export of other commodities of Malabar went down from about the end of the sixteenth century. A number of factors must have been responsible for this. The system of procurement through the use of force, successfully operated through most of the sixteenth century, had begun to break down. The very rich pepper principalities south of Cochin—Porakadu, Kayamkulam, Carnapoli, Coylan, Attingal and Travancore—had re-established links with Asian merchants and begun to sell their pepper in open markets. The Portuguese did not have the capital or the shipping capacity to take possession of even what was offered to them through these pepper contracts. The constant warfare to the north of Cochin, first with the Zamorin and later with the Kunjali Maraikkar and Ali Raja, made them loosen their hold on the south and opened up this area to Asian private trade.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century all the major commercial powers of Malabar had come to terms with the Portuguese. Calicut, especially after the alliance of 1600 against the Kunjalis, benefited from these friendly relations. With or without Portuguese passes, coastal shipping between south Malabar ports and the Zamorin's ports transported pepper and took back opium, making Calicut once again a pepper emporium of the region. Likewise Cananore, after Ali Raja came to terms with the Portuguese, grew into a major centre of pepper exports. Conflicts with Mapilla naval power continued in the first decade of the seventeenth century, but these were contained and quickly settled. During this period the trade from Calicut and Cannanore to the Red Sea ports

of Aden and Mokha was resumed, largely with Portuguese passes. In these early decades of the seventeenth century vast quantities of pepper were being transported from these Malabar ports to the Red Sea.

Another trade route that picked up during the turn of the century was the north–south route from Malabar to Surat and Gujarat ports. This was carried on primarily under Portuguese protection as part of the seasonal *kafilas* which took Portuguese passes and had to call at Diu or Chaul to pay Portuguese taxes. Surat merchants used this route to transport pepper from Malabar ports and to make Surat an entrepôt for Malabar pepper, which they or other carriers would then transport to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. By way of imports these ships took opium and cotton from Surat, which found excellent markets in south Malabar. These Surat ships bought pepper in different Malabar markets. Some went to the southern ports of Kayamkulam and Coylan, where pepper was plentiful and cheaper than in the north. But as Calicut and Cannanore regained their ascendancy, the large Surat vessels stopped at these ports instead of going south, to use them for wholesale import and export trade. Thus Calicut and Surat developed an important nexus in the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Towards the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the ports of south Kanara emerged as important centres of Portuguese trade. Partly because of its proximity to Goa and its remoteness from the constant strife of the Malabar coast, the Portuguese began to shift to Kanara as their pepper purchasing market. The other major attraction in Kanara was the abundant supply of rice which the Portuguese needed desperately for their growing colonies of Goa, Cochin, Colombo, Jaffna and Galle. Though Kanarase pepper was more expensive than that of Malabar, it was reputedly of better quality and the mechanism for purchase was less cumbersome. The Portuguese had established strategic fortified ports there and developed small colonies of settlers, through whom they were able to manage the trade. There was less conflict here with local coastal powers and with maritime merchants because here the Portuguese themselves acted as merchants, not as rulers

(as they did in Malabar). By the first decades of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were procuring twice as much pepper from Kanara as they were getting from Malabar, another index to the economic collapse of their Malabar coastal empire.

One reason for the increased price of pepper in Kanara was that these were free markets where Asian merchants made their major purchases for various Asian markets. The Surat and Dabhul merchants were major buyers there, away from Portuguese control or taxation, for Gujarat, Hindustan and West Asian markets. Also, Arab and Persian merchants sailed to Kanara and to Bijapur ports to the north which also contributed to pushing up prices. Indeed when the first northern European companies came into the Indian pepper trade, it was to Kanara and Bijapur ports that they sailed in search of this staple. The hinterland political powers, well aware of the advantages they had, strove to keep the trade free from interference by outside forces and themselves kept a tight reign on the commercial process. The availability of rice was also a great attraction to Gujarati, Arab and Persian traders, who were thus able to procure here the staples for the India–West Asia trade.

In 1599 the Zamorin of Calicut had come to a treaty with the Portuguese by which he consented to a joint attack on the Mapilla stronghold of Kottai in return for a promise of cartazes for the Zamorin's ships to Bengal, the Gujarat and Kanara coasts, the Red Sea and South East Asia. After a bloody and prolonged battle the fort was taken, and Kunjali captured, then executed in Goa. The Zamorin had reversed traditional policy and turned against his erstwhile allies because he feared the growing power of the Mapillas in his kingdom. The northward trade of Malabar was increasing and he wanted Calicut to have a share of this trade. For this purpose it was necessary to have Portuguese protection so that Calicut ships could join the regular northward *kafilas*. Though the Mapilla fort was taken this was not the end of Mapilla trade or naval presence in Malabar. Mapilla leaders of the Kunjali family dispersed to other ports of Malabar, vowing to carry on the fight against the Portuguese. There is strong reason to believe that the upsurge of piracy in the west coast waters in the first three or four decades of the seventeenth century was caused by this displacement of Mapilla

power. A nephew of Kunjali Maraikkar, who had been taken in captivity with his uncle and had been baptised into Christianity as a youth, later turned against the Portuguese and led some daring raids on Portuguese fleets and settlements all along the Malabar coast. This Malabar piracy was a destabilising factor in the trade of the Arabian sea in the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Both Calicut and Kanara continued to grow in the early seventeenth century, at the expense of Cochin. This growth was linked to the rise of Surat to the north and to the expansion of the westward trade to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. It was also boosted by the entry into these waters of the English and the Dutch East India Companies from the first decade of the seventeenth century. Both the English and the Dutch established contact with Calicut through Calicut merchants trading in Acheh, and the Zamorin enticed them to his ports with offers of extensive concessions. Neither of these powers was strong enough to confront the Portuguese, who were vigilant against any attempts by Europeans to establish themselves in states with which they had treaties of alliance. The English and the Dutch, however, took every opportunity to trade in Malabar ports, buying pepper wherever possible to supplement their purchases in Sumatra. This steadily ate into whatever was left of the Portuguese monopoly of pepper in south Malabar. The pepper of south Malabar found its way to Calicut and Cananore, where a free market operated, with the purchasers being Gujaratis from Surat, Arabs from the Red Sea and the Companies, whenever they made their appearance. The Dutch tried to participate in the trade from Malabar to the Red Sea ports, exporting pepper and cardamom, but could not compete with Malabaris. The Malabaris used the Dutch and English as cover against the Portuguese, though the latter tried to break up these contacts wherever they could. Thus English and Dutch participation provided a boost to Malabar trade in these early decades, though the English found it difficult to establish permanent relations with Malabar trade and tended to tap it more from Surat through Gujarati middlemen.

From the 1630s, after the Dutch had established relations with the King of Kandy in Ceylon, Dutch fleets made more regular appearances in Malabar and Kanara. These fleets conducted an

annual blockade of Goa and traded with Malabar whenever they could. If they could not trade with Malabar because of Portuguese opposition, they traded in Bijapur and settled a factory in the port of Wingurla as a refreshing point for the fleet. The Dutch blockade of Goa helped the trade of English and Indians who were able to purchase pepper and ship it freely to West Asia. After the English had come to an agreement with the Portuguese in the east in 1636, they were able to trade in Cochin and Goa and buy pepper in Malabar. With the weakening of Portuguese naval power in Malabar, the Dutch were able to intensify their trade on this coast. Dutch vessels called at the southern Malabar ports of Kayamkulam and Porakad, and at Cannanore and Calicut further north. Here they bought pepper and sold a variety of South East Asian goods. The Dutch found in Malabar a good demand for South East Asian spices from Indian merchants who shipped them to Gujarat and West Asia. But as this trade was affecting direct sales of spices by the Dutch in these markets, they decided not to ship spices to Malabar: thus a growing import trade was aborted.

In the first four decades of the seventeenth century there is increasing evidence of Malabar piracy in the waters of western India. It is not clear what the sources of this piracy are, but it is possible that the defeat and destruction of Kunjali Maraikkar's fort and settlement led to the dispersal of Mapilla armed bands in their fast oar-powered sailing ships, rather like the Bugis' dispersal after the conquest of Makassar in a later period. The English had seized two Calicut ships in 1619 in settlement of a claimed debt from the Zamorin. This seems to have led to a period of hostility between Malabar freebooters and the English, and over a period of years prizes were taken by both sides. The English attacked Malabar ships off the Gujarat coast and Malabar vessels appeared all along the coast attacking English and other vessels when they had the opportunity. Sometimes fleets of twenty to thirty Malabar frigates were reputedly engaged in piracy on the high seas. In 1638–9 they seized two large English ships, *Comfort* and *Hope*, and took the crew prisoners, demanding ransom and compensation for what the English had plundered from them. Through the intercession of the

Surat merchant Virji Vohra this ransom was paid and the Englishmen released. In 1640, a well-laden Malabar ship with cargo to the value of Rs 200,000 sailing from Mocha to Cananore, was taken by the English after a furious battle in which 40 English and 250 Malabaris were reported to have died. The Malabaris also attacked ships of the other English Company, the Courteen's Association. This undeclared war went on through the 1640s. The English attacked Malabar vessels trading with the Red Sea and Gujarat at every opportunity. The English privateer Morse also attacked Malabar vessels. In 1659 the English were permitted to establish their trade at Calicut, and relations improved between Malabaris and the English. The English were expanding their southward trade from Surat to Kanara, Malabar and the southern tip of India. They were making large purchases of pepper from Kanara and Malabar shortly before the Dutch conquest of Cochin and Coylan.

After the Dutch had expelled the Portuguese from Sri Lanka, they turned their attention to the Malabar coast. The Dutch Admiral Van Goens, who had become the Governor of Ceylon in 1660, lost no time in sending a fleet to attack Portuguese forts on the Malabar coast. The fort of Coylan was taken in 1660, the Portuguese capital fort of Cochin in 1663, and two smaller forts to its north, Cannanore and Cranganore, in 1664. Immediately afterwards, Dutch policy towards Malabar trade began to unfold itself. A treaty, entered into with the Raja of Cochin, confirmed his position as a Dutch vassal, and the Dutch secured total control over the trade and produce of the kingdom. Similar treaties were entered into with the numerous other rulers of the coast, in which the standard terms were to provide a monopoly to the Dutch in the purchase of pepper, and an import monopoly to them in opium. There was also a provision to exclude other competitors, European and Asian, from trade in these commodities. Many of the rajas also promised to prevent the transport of pepper by land from their territory. In order to increase the demand and value of Sri Lankan cinnamon, the Dutch sought to ban exports of the adulterated variety that grew in Malabar—the 'wild cinnamon,' as they termed it. These aims were to be accomplished by the contracts signed with

Malabar rulers, which were intended to provide the legitimacy for a blockade of the coast and the inspection of vessels—Indian and European—against the carrying of goods declared contraband.

Cochin and the southern rulers were easily reduced to submission and signed treaties containing strict restrictive provisions. To the north this was more difficult. Ali Raja of Cananore had to be permitted to trade in a fixed quantity of pepper. The Zamorin had to be given greater concessions. The treaty with him stipulated for the sale to the Dutch of 500 Candy (or 250,000 Dutch pounds) of pepper, and he could trade in any quantities over and above this. Both these rulers were to prove a thorn in the side of the Dutch. The Zamorin had old ambitions in his southern frontiers with Cochin and was particularly anxious to get rid of the Dutch fort at Cranganore in order to carry out trade freely from ports on this coastline. The Dutch, as protectors of Cochin, had to engage in land battles against the Zamorin in defence of the Raja's territories. The pattern of Calicut–Cochin rivalry with the European power protecting Cochin was resumed with Dutch conquest and continued into the eighteenth century.

Armed with these treaties, the Dutch began a regime of control of the trade of Malabar. The ships from Gujarat arriving at Malabar ports were to be inspected by cruising Dutch vessels to see that they did not carry opium. In the early months, such opium as was found on them was to be unloaded and paid for at Surat prices. Later, it was confiscated. Upon departure, the vessels were inspected to see that they did not carry pepper or cinnamon. Any of these commodities discovered on them were confiscated without payment. Ships could trade freely in other commodities. The Dutch concentrated their attention on the south Malabar coast, setting up six watchposts between Cochin and Coylan, cruising the area to prevent the transport of pepper to northern ports of Cananore and Calicut as well as the import of opium into these lands. They realized that these were the most productive pepper lands on the coast and the price of pepper here was cheaper than in the north. This was the source of pepper for Calicut, which kingdom did not contain large pepper-producing lands within its jurisdiction.

The Dutch were expecting their contractual relations with the

pepper-producing and trading states of Malabar and their superior naval might to obtain for them the monopoly of Malabar pepper that had been denied to the Portuguese; they neglected to adopt commercial means to ensure control of the market. Instead, they fixed the prices of south Malabar pepper at 12 Rixdollars a Candy (of 500 Dutch pounds) while the governing Malabar price was 14 to 15 (sometimes 17) Rixdollars. Furthermore, in an effort to boost their import trade—having declared illegal the private import of opium—they contracted to pay for pepper in opium and fixed the exchange rate between the two commodities at a pound of opium for 100 pounds of pepper. Even from the very first years of the conclusion of their monopoly contracts, the Dutch had little success in engrossing either the export of pepper or the import of opium. Large quantities of pepper from the principalities south of Cochin were being shipped out from the many ports and estuaries, or by inland waterways and land routes to northern ports. The strong presence of the English, and of numerous Indian exporters in these ports, kept pushing the price up, widening the gap between the Dutch fixed price and the market price.

The situation relating to the opium trade was no better. Malabar received its opium from Bengal and Surat, and there were a variety of avenues for its import. Opium was imported freely from Surat into the northern ports, from where Malabar merchants could easily transport it by sea or by land into the southern states. The Dutch brought large quantities from Bengal, expecting to profit from the favourable exchange they had fixed with pepper. The demand for opium in Malabar was a restricted one; soon the increased Dutch and Indian imports glutted the market. The price of opium fell and before long the Dutch had large stocks unsold in their warehouses. They had to drop the exchange ratio between opium and pepper at first to sixty pounds of pepper for a pound of opium, and then to forty pounds of pepper. This barter trading was carried on with spices such as nutmeg and cloves as well, and the ratios had to be adjusted to reflect the rising price of pepper in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The Dutch realized the futility of trading in this fashion and shifted to paying for pepper in silver specie.

To the north of Malabar, Dutch trading interests were primarily

in the rice exports of Kanara. They had here established trade relations with the Nayak of Ikkeri and the Sultan of Bijapur. Rice imports to Malabar had to be kept open to supply the Dutch controlled ports of Cochin and Coylan, and to victual the ships that sailed in the western Indian Ocean. Kanara rice exports were also vital to the Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka, both for the consumption of the local community and the large Dutch establishment there. Thus, under the Dutch the close connection between Kanara and Malabar that had existed under the Portuguese continued. Kanara merchant families became well established in southern Malabar ports and entered into close links with the Dutch. In 1652 the Portuguese forts in Basrur and Mangalore had been annexed by the Nayak, freeing the trade of Portuguese control. Portuguese naval power in the Malabar–Kanara waters had been decimated by the Dutch. The Dutch estimated that they could purchase about 1,250,000 pounds of pepper annually from Kanara, at prices which were about 25 to 50 per cent higher than in south Malabar. They decided to try to buy up this pepper to avoid it falling into the hands of their European and Indian rivals. Also available in Kanara was abundant rice for Sri Lanka and Malabar. Kanara also produced a species of inferior (wild) cinnamon, estimated at about 500,000 pounds. This too the Dutch wanted to prevent from falling into the hands of European rivals in order not to spoil the market for the superior Sri Lankan varieties, which they had by now mastered.

The ports of Kanara and Bijapur were also busy centres of Asian shipping. When the Portuguese were dominant on the seas, these ports traded with West Asia, northwards to Surat and eastwards to Coromandel and Bengal, with Portuguese cartazes. The merchants were both Mapilla Muslims of Malabar and Hindu Chetties and Saraswats. The Mapillas seem to have shifted their attention to Kanara from Malabar, where they were engaged in hostilities against the Portuguese and the Zamorin there. Honavar and Bhatkal became ports where Mapilla trade was dominant. Feeling the intense Dutch pressure on Mapilla trade in Cannanore, Ali Raja appears to have removed his operations to Mangalore and attempted to rebuild an old fort as his central seat in 1666. The Nayak of Ikkeri,

however, was not agreeable to his entrenchment there: he expelled him from the fort. The Kanara and south Bijapur coasts continued to have an expanding trade into the 1660s and early 1670s, fostered by the interventionist policies of the Nayaks in favour of trade. The Nayaks, from the time of Venkatapa I (1586–1629), emerged as merchants and ship-owners, entering into contracts with Portuguese, English and Dutch to supply pepper and rice. The English settled a factory in Bhatkal and the three European nations were encouraged to compete for these commodities, pushing up prices steadily in the course of the seventeenth century.

In 1667 the Dutch entered into a treaty with the Nayak of Ikkeri and were permitted to establish a factory in Basrur. They contracted with the Nayak to buy pepper at the market price, considerably higher than the Malabar price. The payment had to be made in cash as the Nayak refused to accept payment in goods. In this factory the Dutch carried out purchases of pepper and rice, and were able to dispose of imports such as spices and Japanese copper at Surat prices. Further to the north, the Dutch established a factory in Wingurla in Bijapur in 1637, then primarily useful for procuring refreshments and provisions for the fleet that blockaded Goa. They built a substantial stone residence here and expanded trade from the 1650s with the import of spices and copper. The rise of Maratha power in the western Deccan and the conflict with Bijapur curtailed the possibilities of import trade into the hinterland and, after much difficulty with the administering power, the factory was abandoned in 1685.

During the second Anglo-Dutch war of 1666, the Dutch were able to isolate English factories in Malabar but could not drive the English out of this coast entirely. The English dealt with various rulers periodically and succeeded in obtaining their supplies of pepper for the European market. Malabar rulers did not wish to be too friendly for fear of incurring the wrath of the Dutch. They took every advantage of this competition to increase prices and impose export duties, which caused particular problems in relations with the Zamorin of Calicut. The English dealt with the Mapilla traders and with Ali Raja, but again at a price. They knew that pepper was cheap and abundant in the south, and that local and provincial

rulers were anxious to break Dutch monopoly claims. They developed strategies to land in southern ports and load large quantities of pepper with lightning rapidity, to avoid Dutch cruisers and outposts. In the 1670s the English were exporting large quantities of pepper from Malabar, and their officials asserted that two-thirds of this came from south of Cochin, breaking the Dutch blockade. As their activities and their power in western India grew, they became more confident of challenging Dutch claims. The Malabar rulers too were more prepared to deal with them and grant them concessions. In 1678 the Rani of Coylan allowed them to settle a factory in her kingdom, and in 1679 they established contact with the Queen of Attingal. In 1682 they opened a factory in Tellicherry. After 1666 the French were also appearing in these waters and established contacts with Calicut. The Zamorin allowed them to purchase and export pepper from one of his ports and tried to entice them to settle in Aicotta, but Dutch machinations forestalled this. The French were distracted by other events for a few years.

Dutch conflict with the rajas of the southern principalities worsened in the 1670s as the Dutch extended their control over the trade between Malabar and the ports of Madura Bay. This short-distance trade took in a variety of goods. It played an important role in the economy of these states and its interruption affected innumerable traders and boatmen domiciled in these ports, as well as the income of the rulers. The Raja of Kayamkulam was the most active of the trading princes. He became openly hostile to the Dutch, encouraging the clandestine sale of pepper to English and Indian merchants, and the import of spices in breach of his contracts with the Dutch. Encouraged by the show of independence of this ruler, others started following this path, and after ten years of the Dutch erecting their monopoly system it was clear to their officials that it was not working. Southern pepper was being sold not only to European competitors but also to Indians. Surat merchants who sailed to Calicut gradually extended their pepper purchases to the south, slipping past the Dutch blockade through several avenues. Sometimes the vessels were caught by Dutch cruisers, though the Dutch were not too hard on Surat vessels for fear of repercussions to their trade in Surat. The attraction for engaging in this clandes-

tine trade was the low price of pepper south of Cochin, as compared to the price north of Calicut and in Kanara. The Dutch found that they had to increase the purchase price in Cochin, Kayamkulam and Coylan to ensure that they received abundant supplies. In 1675 the Dutch discovered that the English had been able to export 1.5 million pounds of pepper from Kayamkulam. The amount of pepper the Dutch were able to export from ports south of Cochin declined from an annual average of 1.75 million Dutch pounds in the first six years after the conquest of Cochin (1663–1669) to 600,000 pounds per year in 1670–4.

If the Dutch hold on the trade to the south was loosening—in an area where their capital seat was located (Cochin) and where they had another fort (Coylan)—they never really succeeded in establishing a hold on the trade to the north of Cochin. True, they had made contracts with the Zamorin and with Ali Rajah and a few other lesser rulers to the north. But none of these gave them monopoly rights, and both the Zamorin and Ali Rajah soon violated even the less stringent terms. Both had agreed to deliver a stipulated quantity of pepper to the Dutch and prevent the transport of opium from their ports southwards beyond Cochin. The Dutch found it difficult to secure the agreed pepper from these rulers, and they both freely transported opium, both by sea and by land, to the hinterland and to the south. They traded freely with the English, French and Portuguese, encouraging every type of Indian and Asian shipping in their ports.

The Dutch could not restrict Asian shipping north of Calicut, ceasing to do so after a few futile attempts. Calicut re-emerged as an important port far surpassing Cochin, which continued on the road to decline which had begun under the Portuguese in the first half of the seventeenth century. With the decline of Portuguese sea power, the sea route between Calicut and Surat was now free of all control. The Dutch freely granted passes for ships for Surat and Calicut, as did the English, but not to ports to the south of Cochin, though by the 1680s even this restriction was lifted in order to boost the trade of Malabar. The great demand for pepper in Surat, Arabia and Persia was fed by Indian merchants of Gujarat and Malabar. Surat shipping resorted to Calicut in large numbers for

pepper, both for the demand of the Surat hinterland right into Hindustan as well as for the Arabian and Persian trade. The prominent Surat merchant Virji Vohra was a large-scale importer of pepper from Malabar and Kanara; he often supplied the English and the French when they were unable to ship direct from Malabar. In return these merchants exported opium and cotton to Malabar. These goods were redistributed from Calicut by Malabar merchants to the interior and upto the far south.

What share of this export trade was held by the Mapilla Muslims is difficult to determine. The evidence is random and fragmentary, but there was very definitely a continuing trade of Malabar Muslim shippers to Surat, Bandar Abbas, Mokha, Muskat, the Maldives and Coromandel. The Dutch faced stiff competition from these shippers in the sales of pepper in Mokha and Bandar Abbas. They also exported cardamom, ginger, arecanuts and coconut produce. During the period of intense competition in the pepper trade in West Asia, Malabar shippers were able to sell pepper for as low as 4.5 Stuivers a pound when the cost price in south Malabar was about 2.5. St. and in Calicut 3 to 3.5 St. Malabar Muslim and Hindu merchants were in competition with the Dutch in Coromandel and in Bengal for the sale of pepper. The Mapilla hold on the Maldives trade continued throughout the century, except for a period when they had problems with some factions on the islands that led to conflicts. One faction appealed to the Dutch for help, and for a time the Dutch expanded into the islands in the hope of dislodging the Mapillas from trade. This, however, was a short-lived venture.

The kingdom of Cochin increased its dependence on the Dutch. Its new protectors enabled it to maintain its territorial integrity and its northern frontiers with Calicut, though not without considerable Dutch investment in arms and manpower. In the conflicts that erupted in the 1670s, the Dutch had to intervene with their troops and auxiliaries on the side of the Raja of Cochin. Cochin as a port became more and more solely devoted to Dutch Company trade. The freedom that was granted to Asian trade was severely curtailed and the flourishing Portuguese *casada* trade disappeared. The links which this trade had provided with Bengal were thus broken; Asian

trade to Cochin was strictly regulated by the issue of passes and by a regime of cruising around the approaches to Cochin and ports to the south. In the absence of freedom to trade in pepper and opium, Asian shippers ceased sailing to Cochin. The only attraction to these merchants was the possibility of purchasing exclusive Dutch imports such as spices and Japanese copper. But the prices of these were so regulated that there was little profit in merchants trading in these with other Asian ports such as Surat, Bandar Abbas and Mokha, where the Dutch themselves traded in these goods.

The customs revenues of the port of Cochin were shared between the Dutch and the raja. The dwindling private trade drastically cut these revenues and impoverished the raja's treasury. This made it impossible for him to balance his budget and meet the expenses of administration and security. The Dutch were forced to pick up the bill for an impoverished raja. The raja himself became dependent on merchants who supplied him with credit to manage his household. These merchants were mainly Kanarase brahmans and Malabar or Tamil Chetties, whose influence the Dutch felt to be malevolent. They would utilize this influence in court to extend their networks to the other regions to derive advantage in their commercial activities. Agents for these merchants were scattered in the pepper-producing villages, giving advances and contracting for pepper from the peasants. These merchants became the major suppliers of pepper to the Dutch, to other Europeans, and to Asian exporters. They advised the petty princes of the southern pepper lands in defying their contracts with the Dutch, and provided links for them with European and Asian buyers. They organized the smuggling of this pepper past Dutch watchposts. As a result, by the end of the 1670s the price of southern pepper, which had stood at 1.75 to 2 St. a pound in the 1660s, now rose to 2.5 to 3 St. a pound, coming close to the prevailing price in Calicut and Cannanore. The Dutch were thus forced to pay these prices to be ensured of supplies, and to adjust the barter ratios between pepper and opium, and pepper and spices, correspondingly.

Evidence for the 1680s confirms an acceleration of earlier trends towards a wider participation of Malabar in Asian trade, and a greater freedom from the restrictions imposed by the Dutch. With

the phenomenal growth of Surat as a trade emporium, the Gujarat–Malabar trade nexus strengthened. There was two-way shipping between Surat and the other Gujarat ports of Broach, Cambay, and Diu, and with the Malabar ports of Calicut, Cannanore and Ponani. Gujarati Banyas and Muslims were prominent participants in this trade, and Surat became a major re-export market for pepper, for which the source was not only Malabar but also Kanara and Bijapur. In 1680 Dutch officials at Cochin observed that Surat ships coming to the Zamorin's ports had increased over the last few years from around two to four a year to twelve to fourteen a year. In that year, Dutch officials in Surat had granted seventeen passes for Malabar, and noted that twenty ships had appeared in Calicut and Ponani. Malabar Mapilla shipping continued to flourish. It left from the northern Malabar ports, and the Dutch were unable to control it. These ships sailed to Surat, and direct to Mokha and Muskat. Besides pepper, these ships were taking cardamom and wild cinnamon. This latter was a produce much desired in West Asia, though inferior to the Sri Lankan cinnamon exported by the Dutch because of its very low sale price. The Mapillas dominated a local trading system embracing the Maldive Islands, Madura and Tanjore, Sri Lanka and Coromandel, and sometimes even Bengal. Of the Malabar–South East Asia trade there is little evidence except some sailings from Calicut to Acheh sponsored by the Zamorin, for which he requested and received passes from the Dutch. Attempts by the Dutch to control the local trading system, partly by force, partly by competition, were unsuccessful.

This continuation and expansion in some sectors of the trade of Malabar was done at the expense of the Dutch. They could do little to combat it. The first instinctive reaction was to tighten the screws of control, set up more watchposts along the coast, put more cruising vessels on the seas. The method was adopted and generally had an immediate temporary effect. During the season that this was done, the Dutch would have had more pepper delivered to them in the south. But they realized that they could not afford to continue with this expensive application of coercion. With relaxation, Asian trade returned and flourished. Dutch official thinking, both in Cochin and in Batavia, became sceptical about the effec-

tiveness of coercion and tended more towards mercantile means to revive flagging Dutch trade. It was realized that it would be more fruitful to increase prices nearer market rates, to allow some freedom in imports and exports, and to compete by such means openly with other merchants than force the trade into submission.

This policy change was also motivated by the desire to revive the trade of Cochin and rehabilitate the economy of this very impoverished city and its ruler. The Dutch did not wish to repudiate the contracts made with Malabar rulers, which gave them prescriptive rights over import and export trade. Rather, while keeping intact the treaties and the legitimacy of their right to the pepper of the land, they permitted by a concession the rulers to the south of Cochin to sell pepper to private merchants. These merchants were encouraged to ship this pepper to Cochin. Another reason for this liberalization was that, after the conquest of Bantam in 1682, the Dutch had dominant access to the pepper of Bantam and Palembang. This pepper was flowing in abundance into Batavia; the storehouses were full. Direct shipment of pepper from Malabar to Europe, via Sri Lanka, had been cut down by the Directors to about 1 to 1.5 million pounds. The several factories in Malabar, including Cochin, were overstocked with pepper in the 1690s.

In Cochin, earlier restrictions on the private export of pepper were lifted. Quite the reverse, Surat ships were now provided with passes and encouraged to come to Cochin, where they were assured a supply of pepper. This meant of course that the sale price at Cochin to these merchants had to be kept at or near the market price of the region. Yet, because of the access to regions of the south that produced pepper at the lowest prices, and because of the very small distances involved, the Dutch were able to get a profit of 25 per cent on the pepper they bought in the south and sold to merchants at Surat. This was a favourable enough situation compared to the previous one, where they were unable to profit in any way from the private trade in pepper. It was also a way of expanding trade and customs revenues in Cochin. It was hoped that the merchants would purchase other local produce in the port, bring in import goods for consumption, and most importantly specie which was becoming a problem for money circulation in the port-

city. From the point of view of the Surat merchants there was now available yet another source of bulk supply of pepper, and there was the advantage of engaging in legitimate trade without worrying about the Dutch cruiser passing by. The Dutch also sought to take advantage of this traffic by encouraging Surat and Malabar merchants to bring coffee from Mokha for re-export to Europe.

From the detailed statistical evidence available on the trade of the Dutch in Malabar, some inferences may be made about the overall trade of Malabar in the second half of the seventeenth century. The total turnover of Dutch trade in Malabar, if pepper was not taken into account, is very small indeed, much the smallest of the four Indian regions in which they traded. It is a safe assumption that this is a reflection of the relative size of the total trade of Malabar and its proportionate role in Indian trade. The import trade of Malabar consisted mainly in rice, textiles and cotton, which were items of mass consumption. Rice came in from Kanara and Coromandel, textiles from Coromandel, cotton from Surat. This trade was entirely in the hands of Indians. There is no evidence to evaluate its quantity. Other items of the import trade in which the Dutch participated were opium, copper, tin, lead, iron and steel, and spices. Of the three major spices—nutmeg, cloves and mace—not more than 2500 pounds of each of these items were sold per year by the Dutch, which compares with averages of 80,000 pounds of cloves in Surat, 60,000 pounds in Coromandel, 5000 to 10,000 pounds in Bengal. Japanese copper also sold in very small quantities—35,000 to 150,000 pounds a year, as opposed to sales in Gujarat of upto ten times that amount. Opium was another profitable import commodity which the Dutch tried to engross without success. Malabar had received its opium from Bengal and Surat, and the Dutch tried to ban private imports from both these places. They succeeded in stopping imports from Bengal as the direct trade to Bengal stopped with the expulsion of the Portuguese. But they could not stop imports from Surat, which came through northern Malabar ports and were distributed throughout the region via inland waterways and land routes. Dutch attempts to barter opium for pepper came unstuck with the rising price of pepper, which increased the ratio between opium and pepper. By the 1680s

the country had become choked with opium supplies and the Dutch could not dispose of their imports from Bengal. When they realized that profits on the sale of Bengal opium were less than what they could get in Batavia, they suspended the shipping of Bengal opium to Malabar. The other commodities sold in some quantity were lead, iron, benzoin and sulphur.

It is seen thus that the Dutch could not derive any great advantages from the goods in which they had a dominance of the market and from which they profited immensely in the other regions of India. In spite of some territorial power and access to revenues, their returns from all sources of revenue in trade and political power were very low throughout the seventeenth century. From 1670 to 1700, profits and incomes fluctuated from a low of F 64,662 (1698) to a high of F 298,446 (1680). Apart from the years 1680, 1681, 1683 and 1684, these were never sufficient to cover the expenses of administration and the annual budget was in deficit. This deficit was sometimes as high as F 290,000. In the other trading areas, especially Gujarat, the Dutch were able to finance a good part of their exports from the country through profits on their imports of those goods in which they had market dominance. In Malabar this was not possible: bullion had to be brought in to defray the cost of administration as well as to pay for the exports.

Malabar was not a great consumer of the commodities the Dutch imported—Japanese copper, cloves, nutmeg and mace. The coast had a very narrow hinterland and the states were not of a level of affluence with elite consumption patterns comparable to the rest of India. Mughal high culture had not penetrated Malabar, spice consumption was not deep in society. In any case, the country produced effective substitutes. There was no effective manufacturing activity to utilize minerals like copper and tin. Copper coins were not widely in circulation to create a demand for mintable Japanese copper. The coin of small business was the fanam, minted locally, and larger transactions were carried out in coins from outside the region such as rupees, pagodas of Kanara or Coromandel, ducats of European or Turkish origin and silver reals. There was no urbanization of any scale worth the mention, and ports were

built-up villages on or near the seafront. Cochin, the only port to develop some degree of urban life under European influence, was a stagnant, impoverished place for most of this period.

It was its export trade that brought Malabar into the international trading network. In the period of Dutch dominance, as in the period of Portuguese dominance, no very drastic change seems to have occurred in the structure of this export trade. The only major change was an expansion in the trade in one specific direction—Europe—and perhaps a greater participation by a European power—the Dutch—in Malabar's Asian trade. In the sixteenth century a Portuguese estimate of the total production of pepper in Malabar put it at over eleven million pounds. If Kanara was to be included, the total was put at 35 to 40 million pounds. A later Dutch estimate put this at 26 to 35 million pounds, carried out of Malabar by sea and by land. There is some reason to believe that production expanded in the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries. The Portuguese expected to be able to secure 3 million pounds of this, but their exports from Malabar in the early seventeenth century were much less. Annual averages of total Portuguese exports for decennial periods varied from 1.5 to 2.5 million pounds.

The value of Dutch exports in pepper from Malabar are available from 1670 and the quantity exported may be estimated from this, though not accurately. Immediately after the conquest of Cochin and Coylan, monopoly contracts were rigorously enforced and the price fixed at a base of 2 Stuivers a pound. But within three or four years the controls gave way and the Dutch were unable to secure all the pepper produced south of Cochin for themselves. Prices in the south were increased gradually to 2.5, then 3, and sometimes even more than 3 Stuivers a pound. Then there is the complicating factor that the Dutch bought pepper north of Cochin—in Cannanore, Ponnani, Cranganore and other ports—to supplement their southern purchases. They did this when there was a shortfall in supply in the south and to prevent the northern pepper from falling into the hands of their European competitors. Prices to the north were uniformly higher, with a base of 3 Stuivers and going upto 4 and 4.5 Stuivers in the last quarter of the century.

These factors make it difficult to estimate exact quantities exported from the total value of these exports.

The value of pepper exports of the Dutch fluctuated considerably in the last three decades of the century. This is partly an index to the volatility of the pepper trade in Malabar in this period, as well as of the unsteadiness of the demands from Europe for Malabar pepper. Glamann discusses the trends in the Dutch imports of pepper to the Netherlands. He notes a steadily increasing demand in the middle decades of the century, when total Dutch imports rose from about 3.25 million pounds to a high of 9.2 million pounds in 1670. This produced a glut and reduced prices in 1672–8; the demand was lowered to 6 to 6.4 million pounds and then to 4 to 4.8 million pounds. The Dutch Company derived its pepper from several sources: Bantam, Lampongs, Palembang, Jambi, Acheh and Malabar. South East Asia pepper constituted about two-thirds to three-fourth of the total pepper imports from Asia. After the Dutch conquest of Bantam in 1682, they had engrossed the pepper production of west Java and south-west Sumatra. The Batavian warehouses were overflowing with pepper and Malabar was ordered to cut down shipments to Europe in 1690. The amounts that the Dutch shipped out of Malabar for Europe varied considerably from about 600,000 Dutch pounds in some years to a high 2.5 million pounds in others. In most years the exports were closer to 1 to 1.5 million pounds. The Dutch would have desired a much large quantity of white pepper from Malabar, which sold at high prices in Europe. But only about 100,000 to 150,000 pounds of this could be secured in any year.

Some figures are available for comparative costs to the Dutch of Sumatran and Malabar pepper. In 1689, pepper secured in the ports of Cochin, Porakad and Kayamkulam, with purchase price, discount for loss of weight and expenses of transport, packing, security etc, cost the Company 2 St. 5.75 Penning a pound. The pepper purchased at Coylan cost it 2 St. 7.25Pen. a pound and that purchased at Cannanore 3 St. 1 Pen. a pound, reflecting the high price for northern pepper. In Batavia the pepper secured in Java and Sumatra came to 2 St. 8 Pen. a pound. There was thus a

comparability between the price for the Malabar and South East Asian pepper for the Dutch.

The English Company expanded its exports of pepper from Malabar in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Up till that time, the bulk of its pepper exports were from Bantam, though from 1670 it was beginning to export over 650,000 pounds per year from Malabar. It steadily increased this tonnage in 1674 exceeding a million pounds (1,347,384 lbs) for the first time. After 1682, when it lost its Bantam factory the company seems to have expanded its activities in Malabar. In 1690 its exports reached the highest level so far of 1,905,161 pounds, and during the last decade of the century its exports consistently touched well over a million pounds. During several years it was thus seen to be exporting more pepper from Malabar than were the Dutch with their expensive forts, military and naval presence and contractual relations with local states. After 1684, when the Queen of Attingal permitted the English to establish a factory in Anjengo and then to fortify it, they expanded their naval presence in Malabar and challenged Dutch claims for supremacy in the waters of south Malabar. They refused to acknowledge Dutch passes and forced Malabar vessels to take English passes as well. Towards the last two decades the Danes and the French were also in the region, exporting significant quantities of pepper.

The total European exports thus would add up at the utmost to about four million pounds in the last years of the seventeenth century. Whatever figures one takes as the total production, it is obvious that more than 75 per cent of it was available for trade within Asia. It is clear that no one trader or power could engross the Malabar pepper trade, and that the Dutch were wasting considerable money and energy in attempting it. Realization of this came in the last quarter of the century, and they began participating in the trade in pepper within Asia in markets where Malabar pepper had been sold with profit by Asian merchants. Some elements of this trade have been referred to above, and our evidence does not enable a consistent picture to be presented with quantifiable data, as in the case of the European trade. The main avenues of Malabar pepper trade in Asia are clear enough. The bulk of the exports by

sea would have been to the north to Surat and the Gujarat coast, and westwards to Persia, southern Arabia and the Red Sea ports. There is a record of twenty ships from Surat loading pepper in Calicut and other Zamorin's ports in one year, besides which there were ships from Malabar transporting pepper to Surat and the north. Then there were Gujarat ships sailing direct to Mokha, Muskat, Basra and Bandar Abbas with pepper, as well as Malabar Mapilla ships plying the same route. Some idea of the profits on pepper in West Asia can be got from the Dutch records. In 1673 the Dutch made a profit of 177 per cent on the sale of Malabar pepper in Bandar Abbas and in 1701 the profit was 129 per cent. Profits in Mokha would have been of a similar scale. Mapilla merchants sailing direct from Malabar with costs similar to that of the Dutch would have profited on that scale. Profits for these merchants on cinnamon, cardamom and dried ginger were also high. To the merchants taking pepper to Surat the quantities sold were enormous, feeding as they did the great hinterland of Gujarat, Sind and Hindustan.

A large quantity of pepper was transported by sea and by land to Coromandel. Much of this was done in small-boat traffic by merchants of Coromandel and Malabar. The Dutch attempted to enter and dominate this trade by controlling the supply in south Malabar and by restricting sailing through the Indo-Sri Lankan straits. They were able to share in the trade but not to dominate it in any way. Whenever they thought they had secured a dominant share of the seaborne trade, the land transport of pepper would increase. Whenever they attempted to increase the sale price in the Coromandel ports the supplies through the Ghat routes would increase to even out the price. It is unlikely that the Dutch were able to secure a large share of the pepper market in Coromandel. The position was somewhat different in Bengal. In Bengal, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, direct trade with Malabar seems to have declined considerably. The Portuguese who had been instrumental in encouraging this trade in the early part of the seventeenth century had disappeared from Malabar and Bengal. The Dutch discouraged direct Malabar initiated trade to Bengal, and Bengal merchants did not find it profitable to trade direct with

Malabar. Bengal's western trade was more to the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Surat. Consequently the Dutch were able to secure a large share of the Bengal market in pepper. Their sales of pepper increased steadily in the 1670s from 100,000 to 200,000 pounds, and 450,000 to 700,000 pounds in the 1680s. Bengal merchants imported pepper from Acheh, Johore and Kedah as well, but the quantities are not known.

In the period of Dutch ascendancy there were thus three parallel systems of trade in Malabar. There was the traditional Malabar trade that linked the region with the Indian Ocean trading system conducted by Asian merchants. There was the trade of the Europeans that linked Malabar to the Atlantic trading system, and there was an interface between these two where Europeans, such as the Portuguese, Dutch, English and Danes, operated in the traditional trading system. The primary actors in the Indian Ocean system were the Gujaratis (Hindu and Muslim), Malabar Mapillas, Malabar and Coromandel Chetties and Kanarase Chetties and Brahmans. There is no evidence of any fundamental change to the trade in this system, only an intensified competition by the entry of the Europeans, but this was happening in other sectors as well. The great Dutch investment in coercion and the expulsion of the Portuguese does not seem to have made serious differences to the operation of this trade. It certainly made commercial transactions more difficult and cumbersome, forced realignments in the politics of the commerce of the region, and made the Dutch key players in this politics. The older participants such as the Zamorin of Calicut, Ali Raja of Cannanore, and to the south the queens of Attingal and the rulers of Travancore, continued with their old roles. Travancore in particular was poised at the turn of the century to take a leaf from the Dutch and play the game of monopoly politics. The continuing impoverishment and abject dependence of the Raja of Cochin has been noted above.

A change that happened under the impact of Dutch ascendancy was the emergence of a group of military lords and merchants dependent on the Dutch. It appears that old Malabar Hindu merchant groups who were not prepared to come to terms with the Dutch declined, and in their place arose migrants from Kanara and

the frontier districts of Tamil Nadu. The Kanara merchants were those who probably already had some role in the pepper trade of Malabar but who now became more prominent as middlemen and suppliers to the Dutch. They emerged as wholesale buyers and suppliers of pepper to the Dutch, and as buyers of Dutch imports such as spices, opium and Japanese copper. Through this means they drew close to Dutch officials in Cochin and other ports, and mutually exchanged favours with them. They used this influence to carry on their own commerce, not on long-distance trade to other parts of Asia—this would not have been permitted by the Dutch—but in the coastal trade in western and eastern India and in the Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka. The other group that emerged were the *pattar* or Tamil migrant Brahmans who used the influence they acquired as holders of temple property and *agraharams* in pepper-producing villages. We see them appearing as small-scale middlemen in the collection of pepper, feeding the Kanarase wholesalers and securing credit from them to lend out to pepper-producers to keep them in bondage. Both these groups emerged as a threat to the traditional dominance of the Nairs, who had so far dominated the collection and delivery of pepper. Both Kanarase and *pattar* are now seen in positions of authority in Malabar states, especially the client states of the Dutch. Nowhere is their hold on power seen more than in the state of Cochin, where Kanara merchants controlled the treasury, customs collection and the mint.

Some adverse effects of the Dutch stifling trade was seen by the end of the century in and around Cochin. The raja was going bankrupt and had to borrow large sums from Kanarase merchants and from the Dutch. The Cochin fanam—the standard coin of trade—lost its value and the Dutch were forced to take over its minting under their control to re-establish its exchange rate with other trading coins of the region. It is not known whether this took place in the northern areas beyond the control of the Dutch, or was a problem that resulted from the decline of trade and traffic in these ports. To the north, on the other hand, there were internal warfare and family feuds that broke out among the rulers of Calicut and their dependents, and this would have had a detrimental effect

on trade. The existence of the Dutch forts at Cannanore and Cranganore restricted the freedom of action of the Zamorin and Ali Raja.

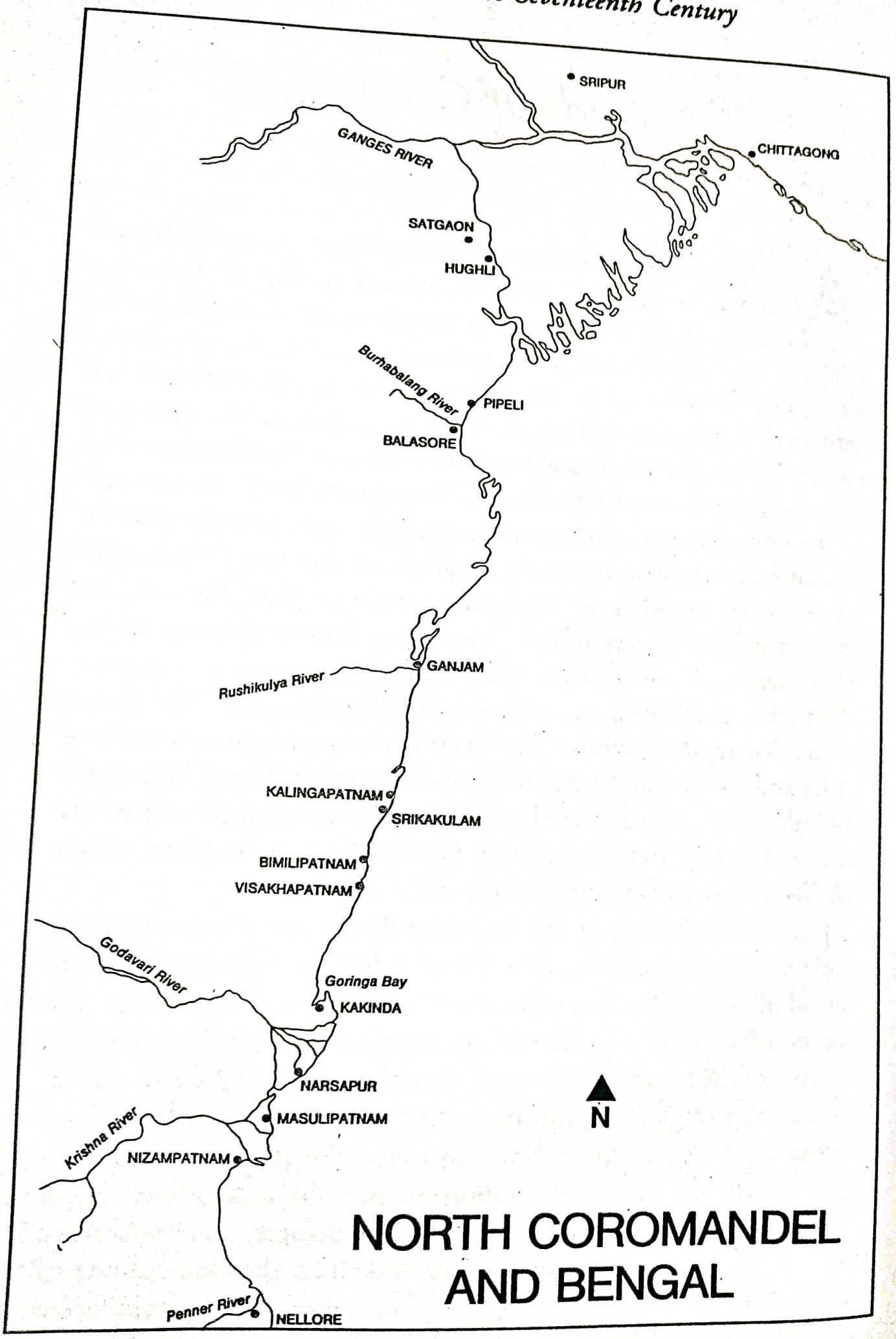
The one aspect in which there was continuity was the persistent roles played by the states and their rulers in commercial transactions. The rulers of the states of Calicut, Cannanore, Coylan, Kayamkulam, to name only a few, continued to be active merchants. The Zamorin and Ali Raja defied all Dutch attempts to reduce them and, at the end of the century, survived as active merchants of the Indian Ocean. They, together with other rulers, took full advantage of the manoeuvrability they had with increasing European competition. Even the southern rulers who had been subjected by the Dutch, and in whose territories the Dutch had an armed presence, fought heavy odds to maintain an effective trade. It was a measure of their success that, in the 1690s, the Dutch virtually declared the southern trade open. The Raja of Kayamkulam and the Queen of Attingal were already defying the Dutch and asserting their independence in trade.

5

The Trade of Coromandel

At the turn of the seventeenth century the Coromandel coast, generally taken during this period to extend from the southern tip of India to the mouth of the Rushikulya river (19° 22′ N), had developed its own patterns of trade, spread out along established routes. Portuguese naval domination had not extended to the Bay of Bengal, but their presence had been well entrenched primarily through private Portuguese settlements with a tenuous connection to the *Estado*. The primary fortified settlement of the Portuguese on this coast was Nagapatnam, situated near the southern tip of the coast, in the kingdom of Tanjore. Other settlements were founded in Mylapore, renamed San Thome, and another on the estuary of the Vellar river, known as Porto Novo. There were, of course, settlements in Bengal, the most important of which was Hughli, and others on the Burma coast. The nature of the Portuguese presence and its impact on the eastern trade of India and the Indian Ocean have been discussed above. This is still the subject of on-going work: there is as yet no clear picture of the extent of this impact, as there is in the western Indian Ocean, which has been studied far more intensively.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a feature of the trade of Coromandel was that it flowed from a wide array of ports spread all along that extensive coast, without centring itself in any one or a few ports of greater importance than others. This is partly because of the nature of the coastline which did not have any natural havens of any great significance. Nor did parts of the hinterland favour any particular port above any other. The ports were uniformly inhospitable during the monsoon months and offered equal advantages outside these months. Some changes that took place during the seventeenth century are linked to the fluctuations of political power in the hinterland. This appears as the one factor that influenced the performance of the ports more than any other.



Map 3 North Coromandel and Bengal

The major political development of the seventeenth century in southern India was the rapid disintegration of the Vijayanagar empire, both at its centre and periphery. The two Islamic kingdoms of Golconda and Bijapur had been largely responsible for this disintegration and expanded at its expense. Golconda annexed the territories in a central and north-eastern direction up to the Bay of Bengal, becoming a major coastal power. Bijapur annexed the southern central lands and also extended to these parts of the coast. Its control of parts of this coast was disputed by Hindu powers, leading to great instability in the mid-seventeenth century.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Coromandel's South East Asian trade was set on a steady course. A trade which had gone on for centuries and had reached great heights during the heyday of the Sultanate of Melaka in the fifteenth century had been interrupted by the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511. It had, however, soon resumed its course and was flourishing. It was carried on both within and outside the Portuguese system. The Portuguese had granted passes to Melaka from Coromandel ports. They sought to attract trade to that port in an attempt to resume the role of Melaka as an entrepôt of Indo–South East Asian trade. Coromandel merchants took advantage of the facilities offered by the Portuguese in Melaka and used it as an entry point to trade further eastwards into the archipelago. It is natural that those who used Melaka more were the Hindu merchant shippers of Coromandel. The Portuguese-fortified port of Nagapatnam became a departure point for these voyages, which took advantage of Portuguese protection, navigation skills and the ability to effectively mount guns on ships. This trade to Melaka declined only with the increasing presence of Dutch naval power in the Melaka Straits and the threat this posed to ships carrying Portuguese passes. When the Dutch began regular blockades of Melaka in the 1630s, this trade declined and Melaka itself fell to steep decline.

Coromandel trade was also carried on outside the Portuguese system. Here Acheh became the prime focus of Coromandel trade, after this port rose to rival Melaka as a South East Asian entrepôt. Acheh was particularly favoured by Coromandel's Muslim merchants, though Hindu shipping also appeared at this port. Acheh

was used as a base for sailing to neighbouring ports on the eastern and western coasts of Sumatra, and across the Straits to the Malay peninsular states of Johore, Perak and Kedah. Perak was subordinate to the Sultanate of Acheh, and concessions secured for the trade in Acheh enabled merchants to proceed to trade in this Malay state with abundant tin deposits. Coromandel merchants also sailed further east through the Straits of Melaka to Javanese and archipelago ports. In the early decades of the seventeenth century there is clear evidence of the presence of Coromandel merchants in the Javanese ports of Bantam and Japara in a manner that shows they were well entrenched there. In Bantam, which was emerging as a major South East Asian port at some time in the first decade, the sabandar of the port was a *kling* (as South Indian Hindu merchants were known in South East Asia). Likewise, a *kling* seems to have been in charge of the sultan's shipping fleet in a position rather like an admiral. As the seventeenth century progresses, we are beginning to see a more eastward penetration of these merchants and their persistent presence in the Sulawesi port of Makassar, which also emerged in these decades as a major port.

Another trade route that Coromandel merchants were pursuing was to the states and ports of mainland South East Asia, to Arakan, Pegu, Tenasserim and the ports of the Burmese and Siamese coastline. This trade must have developed towards the end of the sixteenth century and was expanding into the seventeenth. It was an autonomous development of Bay of Bengal commercial relations, with its own dynamics determined by factors on the Indian end and the Burma/Siam end of the trade link. It was furthered by the entry into these waters of the Portuguese, and by the presence of a strong private-settler trading element in ports and islands of the Ganges delta and the Burmese coast. By the first decades of the seventeenth century regular trade had been established between Coromandel ports and the Arakanese port-capital of Mrauhong, the Burmese ports of Syriam and Pegu, and the southern Siamese port of Mergui. In time this trade route extended overland through river and road to the Gulf of Siam, and on to the capital port-city of Ayuthya, giving Coromandel merchants access to the eastern parts of Siam and further east to Laos and Cambodia. This trade

was also carried on by a mix of trading people from all over the Coromandel coast. It was shared by Hindu and Muslim merchants who had established close links with the rulers of these states, and who had founded settlements of communities which functioned as factors in the ports to facilitate their trade. This was not just a one-way trade undertaken from Coromandel. It was reciprocal, Arakanese, Pegu and Ayuthya rulers themselves equipping voyages to Coromandel ports in their own ships, and also maintaining their trading factors in major Coromandel ports. There were some state-to-state relations some of which erupted into conflict. While the island states of South East Asia—the sultans of Acheh, Bantam, Makassar—also initiated trade to Coromandel, it appears not to have been on the scale of the Burmese and Siamese monarchs.

The trade to South East Asia was in commodities that resulted from the relative economic strengths of the two regions, which again depended to some extent on physical features and productive capacity. The staple export from Coromandel was cotton textiles, whose sale in the entire South East Asian region must have grown enormously in the seventeenth century. This was a process that began during the ascendancy of the sultanate of Melaka and the international trade regime that arose at that time. The use of Coromandel textiles in trade exchanges embracing Moluccan spices, Javanese rice and South East Asian minerals was well in place. This resulted in the deep penetration of Indian textiles into South East Asian markets. The textiles came from Gujarat, Bengal and Coromandel, but those of Coromandel were generally most desired in Sumatran, Malayan, Javanese and Moluccan markets. The colours, prints and designs had been adapted to suit the tastes of this market, and even their names signified the geographical areas to which they were directed. The Burmese and Siamese markets took in both Bengal and Coromandel produce, with the latter dominating the bottom end of the market and the former catering to finer tastes.

Also exported from Coromandel was rice to Acheh and Melaka, and sometimes to Makassar. These exports came from the Godavari delta and from Tanjore, the two Coromandel regions where surplus rice was produced. Iron and steel were exported from the northern

and the central regions to both island and mainland South East Asia. Tobacco, grown in different parts of Coromandel, was exported to Acheh, but the largest quantities were to Burma and Siam. Indigo was exported to both island and mainland South East Asia, though Gujaratis brought the largest supplies direct to Acheh. There is evidence of a slave trade from Coromandel to Acheh and Melaka in the early seventeenth century, in small numbers, and dependent on the state of agricultural production in the land. Diamonds from the Golconda mines were exported, though Burma was noted for a variety of semi-precious stones which were imported in return. Among minor commodities exported were skins of the rock fish, sappan wood, turmeric, cumin and coriander seed.

The import trade into Coromandel took a greater variety. Spices from the Moluccas—nutmeg, cloves, mace—were always carried, though they were more vendible in northern Coromandel than in the south. There was a steady but limited demand for these commodities all over Coromandel. Pepper would also be carried, especially from Acheh, where it was cheap and abundant but again not in great quantity for Coromandel was generally supplied both by sea and by land from Malabar. Tin was an important import commodity and came from all over the South East Asian region—from Acheh and the Sumatran coast, from Bantam and west Java, from the Malay states of Johore, Perak and Kedah, and from Burma and southern Siam. Tin was vendible all over the Coromandel coast and taken immediately in interior markets. Another bulk commodity that was traded in with profit was elephants. Elephants were bought in Acheh, Bantam, Johore, Perak, Kedah, Tenasserim, Syriam, Pegu and Arakan. Over the years Coromandel shippers had developed a special expertise in the loading, unloading and care of these animals on the long voyage. It appears that the major import market for elephants was Bengal, but the kingdoms of Golconda, Bijapur and Tanjore emerged in the seventeenth century as buyers of these animals. South East Asian elephants competed successfully in Indian markets with those from Sri Lanka. Ivory was also a commodity that featured in this trade. Other minerals and alloys were imported in small quantities—zinc, tutenag, brass. Copper was imported when it could be bought in bulk from East Asian

merchants and in small bits from Burma. Leather and skins were imported from Siam. A variety of lak that was to be found in many parts of the region was a desired import, as also were gum, resin, benzoin and wax that were found in the forests of the region. Then there was sulphur, and quicksilver that probably came from China. A capacious jar, called the Martaban jar, was imported from Pegu. Among the most valuable imports were bullion, gold and silver, mainly in the form of specie and gold dust. South East Asian coins of silver and gold were transported to India to be melted down and sold as bullion. The variety of the commodities traded in enabled risks to be spread out, involving trading in bulk as well as in small lots.

Coromandel's westward trade was slow to pick up in the seventeenth century. Its doing so was an index to the general growth in India's trade to West Asia. When it began to grow, it was from the northern regions of Coromandel which had come under the control of the Islamic sultanate of Golconda. There was a brisk trade to Malabar, but this was a regional trade and did not tie into the long-distance transcontinental trade of the Indian Ocean. It was carried on from the ports of southern Coromandel to the ports of Malabar states, taking rice and textiles to these places and returning with pepper, spices and coconut produce. The Portuguese presence invigorated this trade and linked it with the trade of the *Estado* in Cochin. The long-distance trade to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf developed in the first decades of the seventeenth century from Masulipatnam, as a result of the tie-up of Golconda with the Islamic world and the consequent migration of Persian merchants and grandees to the kingdom and to that port. The potential for this trade always existed in the demand for Indian textiles in the Gulf and the Arabian states. Textiles, rice, iron and steel, tabacco, indigo and diamonds were the major items taken from Coromandel. On the return came Persian silk, horses, coffee, dried fruits, almonds, rose water and, above all, coined specie. Coromandel's West Asian trade started from a low base and expanded in the course of the seventeenth century, most of the trade originating from the port of Masulipatnam. There was, to begin with, no substantial trade to Surat, but with the picking up of the West Asian trade, calls were

made at Surat on the outward or return journey. One reason for the absence of direct sea traffic between Surat and Coromandel ports was that land routes linked Surat with northern Coromandel markets and absorbed much of the trade.

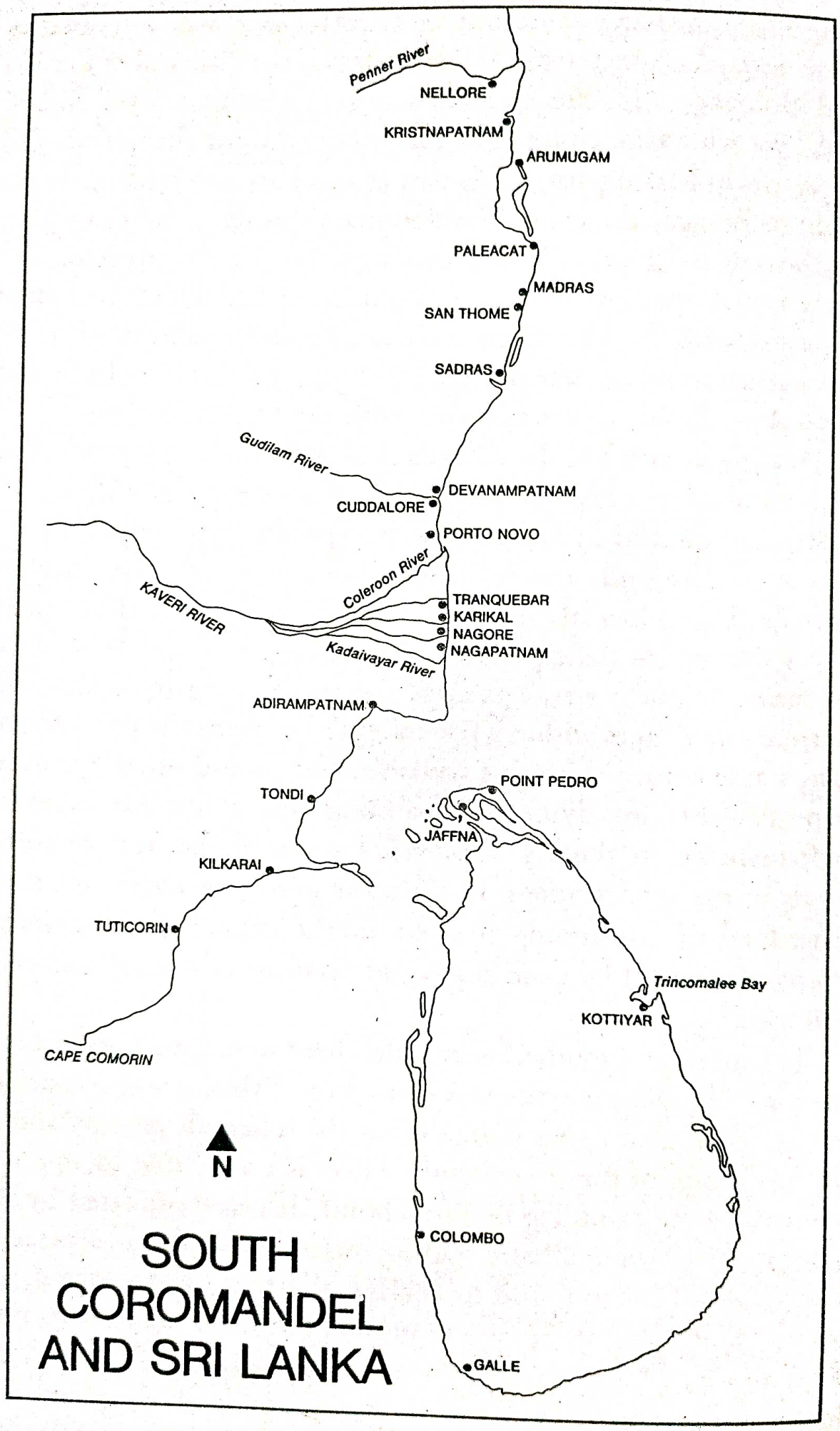
The dispersed character of the ports from which this trade was carried out has been noted above. The most visible port of growth in this period was Masulipatnam, which developed an entrepôt status in the region. It arose from around the 1580s and more rapidly in the seventeenth century, with the consolidation of Golconda's hold on the Andhra lowlands. Major factors in the growth were the support of the state and of royalty and officialdom for this trade; also the attraction of Persian migrants—the result of a special relationship of the sultanate with the Safavid dynasty in Persia. Golconda rulers and nobles started investing heavily in trade from the early seventeenth century, especially in shipbuilding, leading to the accumulation of a sizeable merchant fleet located in Masulipatnam. The neighbouring Godavari river-port of Narsapore developed as a shipbuilding centre. These ships were of a large size, larger than the average merchant vessels of Coromandel, rather like what the Mughals built somewhat later in Surat. The Persian migrant merchants, other Islamic migrants of West Asia and the domiciled Golconda Muslims were the commercial entrepreneurs who managed the investment of the rulers and officials, and were favoured by the considerable political patronage afforded them by these powerful men. The strengthened Masulipatnam's West Asian trade links and gave it a strong advantage above the other ports of Coromandel. There was a solid base of Telugu Hindu merchant communities on whom this commercial infrastructure was built. They still continued in seaborne trade, sailing mainly eastwards, and also provided the feeder support from interior markets to seaborne trade.

Masulipatnam also soon entered the eastward trade across the Bay of Bengal, both southwards into the islands and to the mainland of South East Asia. The trade with Acheh, Bantam and Macassar soon developed, using state-to-state relations and the Islamic connection. Perhaps even stronger than the trade to the islands was the trade to Arakan, Burma and Siam. Here too, state-to-state relations

were established and communities of merchants were dispersed in these ports. A characteristic of this trade was the dispersal of Persian and Golconda Muslims to settlements in southern Siam and in Ayuthya, who were engaged in this trade both for themselves and for agents in Masulipatnam. As part of this northern trade grew the trade to Bengal, alongside Masulipatnam's development as a port for the redistribution of Bengal commodities. The Portuguese, after some initial attempts to control the trade of Masulipatnam, came to terms with it. The sultan cultivated good relations with the Portuguese to ensure safe passage for shipping to western India and West Asia. Problems were to arise with the Dutch later on.

Masulipatnam had the advantage of access to a very productive hinterland of surplus rice cultivation, the weaving and dying industry, indigo cultivation, iron and steel production, timber resources and diamond mines. The abundance of rice, besides contributing to low labour wages and low costs, enabled its export across the seas to deficit areas in South East Asia and West Asia. Its major resource was, however, the textile industry which was clustered in villages within a few miles radius from the port. Abundant staple cotton cloth was available. Indigo and other dye roots were available for dying and painting this cloth. An excellent craftsmanship in these arts provided some of the best coloured goods in the subcontinent. In turn, the port gave access to a deep hinterland of consuming markets in the capital and provincial towns, connected by good roads and caravans of oxcarts and pack bullocks.

In central and south Coromandel there were a number of ports from which overseas trade was carried on. Paleacat was important in the South East Asian trade during the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the seventeenth. There is a view that its role was affected by the founding of San Thome. It was dominated by the Coromandel Hindu Chetty trading interests; sailings took place to Burma and Thailand, and to Malaya and the Melaka Straits. To the south of Paleacat, Mylapore must at one time have been a port for South East Asian trade, but it was not of any significance in the seventeenth century. Further to the south, Sadraspatnam and Devanampatnam were the home of shipping and overseas trade.



Map 4 South Coromandel

Devanampatnam was rather more important and shows evidence of activity in the South East Asian trade. To its south was the port of Porto Novo, which began as a Portuguese settlement but soon developed as a major port in this coast for Indian shipping. To the south of Porto Novo was the port of Nagapatnam, which had a long history of overseas trading to the South East Asian archipelago but, after its control by the Portuguese, seems to have slipped back and the shipping dispersed to neighbouring ports.

This entire central and south Coromandel coast was littered with weaving villages within short distances inland which, by this time, were well geared to production for export. The staple cotton cloth woven here was in great demand in South East Asia. Indigo for dyeing was available, as also a kind of root dye which produced bright red colours. The painting of cloth was also done here for export. These villages had adapted to weaving for various South East Asian markets, and they had become used to the special demands of these markets. This region did not engage in a major import trade. The primary imports were minerals, dyes for the textile industry, and bullion. This trade was the primary source of bullion for the monetary system which was based on the pagoda gold coin. Spices were not in great demand in these lands. The consuming areas were in the interior, towards Bangalore and Mysore, and became important only after the expansion of the Bijapur sultanate.

The merchants of this coast belonged to Hindu and Muslim communities. Hindu merchants of Telugu and Tamil castes had been engaged in the overseas trade of the coast for centuries. They continued in the beginning of the seventeenth century, having been strengthened by the Portuguese connection which tended to favour them at the expense of the Muslims. Hindu shipping was prevalent in the ports of Masulipatnam, Paleacat, Mylapore/San Thome, Devanampatnam and Nagapatnam. These Hindu merchants, who had enjoyed support under the Vijayanagars, were now supported by their successors, the Nayaks of Senji, Tanjore and Madura. Later they came to terms with the Islamic sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda. Muslim ship-owning showed a tendency to grow at a faster rate in the early decades of the seventeenth century, largely

favoured by the expansion of the two southern sultanates. Golconda Muslims and Persian expatriates dominated the shipping of north Coromandel. To the south, the older domiciled Tamil Muslim communities of Chulia Muslims expanded their operations during this period. They came to terms with the Portuguese and traded extensively in South East Asia, in Melaka, the Malay States, Acheh, Bantam, Makassar and in the Burmese and Thai ports.

The first three or four decades of the seventeenth century showed a stability and steady growth in Coromandel trade along lines which had already been traversed. Masulipatnam and north Coromandel became the focus of activity as Golconda state power increased. Agents of state power began to establish control over trade and derive huge benefits from it. Indeed, all state authorities of the coast realized the importance of commerce and were offering inducements to attract Europeans and others to their territories. Masulipatnam's West Asian direct trade began in the 1620s and provided growth to the total trade of the region. When this trade got going, Masulipatnam attracted South East Asian spice imports for re-export to the Persian Gulf. This gave further impetus to the trade to South East Asia, to Acheh and Bantam. The trade to the mainland states of Arakan, Pegu and Ayuthya also accelerated with the great demand for elephants and tin from these lands.

In the southern areas there was even greater stability. The traditional areas of trade were the most favoured. The trade to Melaka, Acheh and the Malay states was steadily pursued. With the weakening of Portuguese Melaka, the direct trade to the Malay states is pursued, without calling at Melaka, as the Dutch found on their conquest of this port in 1641. The Chulia Muslims had established networks in the Malay states of Perak, Kedah and Johore, and the trade in textiles, elephants, pepper and tin was in full swing. The trade to Acheh continued to grow, being carried out from Masulipatnam and from the southern ports. Acheh became a port of outlet for Coromandel textiles throughout Sumatra, and through the Straits into Java and the islands. Again, the Dutch met this trade when they began their expansion into this region. South Coromandel Hindu and Muslim trade to Arakan, Burma and Siam also showed a steady growth in these decades. When the

Dutch and the English attempted to enter this trade from their Coromandel factories in the 1630s, they found the competition very furious. Merchants of Coromandel were well entrenched in the Burmese and Siamese markets.

It was into this situation that the Dutch and the English entered in the early decades of the seventeenth century. They both realized from their South East Asian trade the intrinsic connection between Coromandel and that region. The rivalries between the three European powers—Portuguese, Dutch and English—and their own individual aims towards Asian trade had consequences in the Coromandel coast, destabilizing trade periodically, as in Gujarat. The attention of these powers was centred on Masulipatnam, where they sought trading concessions. The Golconda Governor of Masulipatnam and other port authorities desired to direct and control European trade in order to derive maximum benefits to themselves. Dutch import trade in spices and copper was very lucrative. These administrators tried to engross the commodities and create a buyers' monopoly in them, to their own benefit. They controlled strictly the right to trade with Europeans by restricting access to their factories. Somewhat later, the governor leased out the right to trade in Dutch import commodities for sums which he kept increasing. Also, he exercised the right of pre-emptive purchase of particular commodities at discount prices. Both the Dutch and the English were plagued with such problems upto the 1620s.

They both reacted in a manner similar to what they were doing at the same time on the Gujarat coast, with the use of naval force against Indian shipping. In the first dealings with an English Company vessel that arrived in Masulipatnam, the havaldar, Ahmadu Khan, forced the Company's factor to trade with him and his partner, Basubal Rao, to the exclusion of others both in import and export commodities. In these dealings a debt of 5000 Pagodas accrued to the English in 1614. The Chief English Factor, Peter Floris, unable to take any Masulipatnam ships as prize, kidnapped the havaldar's son and took him on board the English ship. Immediately, the havaldar and other merchants cleared their debts. Similar problems were encountered by the Dutch who, in 1618,

decided to evacuate their factory in the port, withdraw to a neighbouring port of Petapuli and prepared to attack all shipping of Masulipatnam. The havaldar took fright and a farman was procured from the king, ensuring freedom of trade. The Dutch were encouraged to return and resume trade, which they did. Another dispute arose in 1622 over the Dutch capture of a Portuguese vessel on Masulipatnam roads. The havaldar ordered the release of the ship and, when the Dutch refused, he besieged the Dutch factory and stopped all communications between it and the town. The affair was settled with the gift of the captured ship to the Golconda authorities. But conflict broke out the following year, when the Dutch director broke the havaldar's orders restricting export trade and exchange regulations. He and three other Dutch officials were seized and tortured, the director succumbing to his injuries in February 1624. The Dutch were looking for a suitable occasion to take reprisals and extract further trade concessions in order to be free of the great dependence on the havaldar and revenue officials in the transit points of the trade to and from Masulipatnam. In the meanwhile, the Danes were in conflict with the havaldar, Muhamad Taqui, and blockaded the port to get redress in 1627. The English and Dutch consulted among themselves to take joint action against Masulipatnam shipping in order to achieve greater freedom of trade in the port and interior. They were well aware that the chief officials of the port and the inland districts had extensive shipping, with substantial capital for trade in Mocha, Acheh, Pegu and other places. The Dutch had a specific claim for 16,000 Pagodas which was allegedly extracted from them when the director was imprisoned in 1623. Secret plans were made to put the blockade in operation for the trading season of 1630, when ships returned from South East Asia. The plans to seize ships in February/March 1629 could not be put into operation as in the preceeding outward sailing season a storm had prevented many of the large ships from gaining passage. In the meanwhile the English had seized a few small vessels in February 1629 and gained redress for their lesser demands. The English action forced the Dutch to evacuate Masulipatnam, fearing reprisals against themselves. Dutch vessels cruised the roads. A ship belonging to the prominent Masulipatnam merchant Mirkamaldin

was taken on its return from Acheh. Three ships coming from Arakan, and another ship from Acheh, were taken. The Dutch were disappointed that they did not get the rich prizes they had expected.

Masulipatnam commercial interests took fright at these developments. The English debts were quickly settled. Important Muslim merchants came on board Dutch cruisers, with proposals for settlement. The Dutch had not been able to collect their debts on the goods seized at sea. But they thought the stoppage of trade, the loss in revenue, and decline in productivity would force the Golconda central government to take notice of their claims. Merchant intermediaries were prepared to give personal bonds for part of the debts claimed by the Dutch. The blockade was maintained till September, when ships had to begin their outward voyage. At this point a settlement was arrived at, with the havaldar and the merchants giving joint bonds for the payment of outstanding claims from the time of the dispute with the imprisoned director in 1624, and for subsequent debts of merchants who had traded with the Dutch and defaulted on payment for goods bought. With this agreement the blockade was lifted and the Dutch returned to their Masulipatnam factory.

From this Dutch and English evidence, Golconda state policies through the 1620s and 1630s appear to have been disincentives to trade. No doubt there was a great deal of investment by high administrators and recipients of land revenues in commerce and in shipping. But if the European evidence is to be believed, the trade was directed to an excessive degree by officials of the state, the recipients of the revenues of the port and its hinterland—apparently to a much greater degree than was the case in Surat. The havaldars and district governors appear to have had a much greater freedom of action, which they exercised in their own interests. The constraints on freedom of contract seem to have been great, resulting in price fixing, default, merchant indebtedness and reduced turnover. For this reason the trade of the English and Dutch did not increase greatly in these years. Whether it had any effect on the trade of Indian shippers, it is difficult to say. It is possible to argue that Muslim shippers benefited from this state direction, stifling, as it did, European competition, and leaving the field free for

themselves. It may have had an adverse effect on Hindu merchants, especially commodity brokers who thrived on competitive purchase of imports and exports by a variety of clients. One of the constant complaints of the English and the Dutch was that the havaldar prevented Hindu brokers from coming to their storehouses to inspect and bid for goods, whether in their import trade or export trade.

Successive years of adverse weather conditions resulting in shipping losses may also have contributed to a downturn in trade in the late 1620s and early 1630s. Adverse winds, combined with the blockade of ports successively by Danes, English and the Dutch, curtailed the movement of ships during a number of seasons. This was followed in 1630 by a famine in north Coromandel, perhaps not as severe as that of western India but bad enough to adversely affect trade. There was a season of drought, followed by excessive rains and cyclones in successive years, 1630–3, which affected grain production. The price of rice rose steeply, weaving villages were depopulated, transport inland was at a standstill. This affected adversely the trade of Masulipatnam, with a drastic reduction of ships departing on long-distance voyages. This effect on trade continued for many years. It was not till about 1637 that the trade of Masulipatnam began to recover. Part of this recovery was caused by European trade. After the English and Dutch resumed trading in Masulipatnam, their exports of textiles from there started growing and this demand contributed to the repopulation of the Krishna–Godavari weaving villages.

In south and central Coromandel, European trade also acted as a trigger to expansion. The English had been permitted to settle in Arumugam in 1626, and then in the small village of Chennapatnam in 1641—this they were allowed to fortify. The Dutch were ceded a part of the port-town of Paleacat in 1612, where they were allowed to build a fort. From here these two Companies were able to tap the textile markets of central and southern Coromandel. They also entered into competition with Indian shippers for the trade to Burma and Siam, and to the South East Asian islands. The English did not have sufficient capital to enter into this trade in strength. So they freighted goods of Indians to Syriam, Mergui, Acheh and

Bantam, while the Dutch competed with them directly in these markets. Portuguese trade at San Thome had fallen after the Dutch establishment at Paleacat, and even more so after the English foundation of Madras. Indian merchants who had sailed in association with the Portuguese, through choice or necessity, now stopped doing so and traded independently, securing passes from the Dutch and the English. The Danes had established themselves in the south Coromandel port of Tranquebar in 1620 and constructed a fort there. Their own trade was under-capitalized, but they soon established connections with Indians, assisting them in their shipping and navigation.

There is no way of knowing the trends in the volume of trade flowing out of central and south Coromandel, but whatever evidence there is shows continuity in trading contacts through the established links. The trade to Arakan, Pegu and Tenasserim continued, with Muslim and Hindu shipping plying between these two regions. This was also the case with trade to the Malay peninsula, where regular sailings occurred to Kedah, Perak and Johore. The Acheh trade continued to prosper, as did sailings further east to Bantam and Makassar. This shipping was owned both by Coromandel Hindus and Chulia Muslims, and it could well be that the Chulias were beginning to push ahead. Some prominent Hindu overseas trading interests are visible in the 1630s and 1640s, among them the three Malaya brothers based in the Paleacat–Devanampatnam area. Chulia Muslims were based further to the south in Cuddalore, Porto Novo and Karikal, and were sheltered from the Hindu political struggles raging in the central regions in the 1620s and 1630s. The southern regions had cost advantages over the north because of shorter distances travelled, milder taxation regimes, and less intensive competition. These advantages were undermined in the middle decades of the century, with political changes and increasing competition by Europeans and Indians.

The Dutch conquest of Melaka in 1641 had important effects on Coromandel's South East Asian trade. It did not take long for the Dutch to realize the stranglehold Coromandel merchants had on the Melaka trade. They saw that much of the textile trade was carried on from the Kling quarters of the port. They acquainted

themselves with the nature of this trade and the profits that it gave. They also saw that Coromandel Hindu and Muslim merchants sailed to Acheh, Johore, Perak and Kedah and filled the markets with Indian textiles, while buying the bulk of the tin available in these places. The initial reaction of the Dutch chiefs at Melaka was to try and attract these merchants to that port and make it an entrepôt for the export and import trade of the region. Very soon the thinking changed as the enormity of Indian trade in the region of the Melaka Straits was realized, as also the impossibility of competing with this trade in a free environment. So it was decided to reduce Coromandel shipping to these parts by restricting the issue of passes from Coromandel ports. This was a very difficult policy to follow, as rulers of coastal states kept pressing for Dutch passes. Thus the Golconda officials, the Nayak of Senji, the Bijapur officials, and the Raja of Tanjore made requests which could not be refused.

It was decided in 1647 to interdict all Indian trade to Acheh and the tin-producing lands of Perak and Kedah. The Dutch were in dispute with Acheh. Cruising vessels were stationed at the entrance to Acheh and along the Straits to intercept shipping. Thus, a number of Coromandel ships were prevented from sailing to Acheh or its dependent territories. This caused great hardship to Coromandel trade and was initially successful in directing to Melaka most of the tin produced in the mines of this area. Ships that were seized carrying tin were forced to sail to Melaka and unload half the cargo, according to the terms of the treaty with the Malay rulers, and forced to pay a duty for the remainder. A ship belonging to Mir Muhamad Said, the Mir Jumla of Golconda, was seized off Perak and tin unloaded from it. Other merchants who had been treated in this way made bitter complaints to their respective rulers, the Sultan of Bijapur and the Raja of Tanjore. Mir Jumlah threatened reprisals against Dutch trade in Masulipatnam and he had to be compensated. There was opposition in the Malay states as well. The Dutch had erected a watchpost on an island at the entrance to the Perak river to look out for small boats sailing out of the river with tin. In July 1651 a party of Malays set upon the Dutch company stationed there and massacred it. It is believed to

have been at the instigation of influential Indian merchants. The Raja of Kedah also complained to the Dutch over the loss of his trade and asked for compensation. In the island of Ujang Selang, a Dutch soldier was murdered in an altercation over the tin trade.

In Gujarat the Dutch had sought unsuccessfully to cut off the trade to South East Asia at the Gujarati end through a blockade of Surat in 1649. In Coromandel they attempted to stop the trade at the South East Asian end by cruising and interception. This was also equally unsuccessful. It created too much antagonism among a number of Indian rulers and proved difficult to police at the South East Asian end. After the dispute with Acheh was settled, the Dutch had no valid reason to deny passes to that port. After 1650, passes were issued from Coromandel ports with the proviso that these ships should call first at Melaka and pay the tolls of that port. These tolls which had first stood at 10 per cent were increased to 20 per cent. Much of the Coromandel trade absorbed these costs and continued with this lucrative trade. Others slipped past without calling on Melaka and opened trade with other ports, calling more frequently at Johore and further to the north at Kedah. By 1652 the Dutch had recognized that the passes policy was not working and only causing bad blood with rulers of the coast, tending to adversely affect Dutch interests. Thus after a brief interruption, Coromandel–South East Asia trade revived and Dutch attempts to monopolize the export of Coromandel cloth and the import of tin was recognized as a failure.

The progress of trade in Coromandel after the 1640s was affected by several internal factors and political considerations. In Masulipatnam the 1640s and 1650s were characterized by the domination of the Mir Jumlah in overseas trade as well as in the access to internal trade commodities. He emerged as the most prominent ship-owning merchant of the Bay of Bengal, with a fleet of ships sailing to Bengal, Arakan, Syriam, Mergui, Tenasserim, Ayuthya, Kedah, Melaka, Johore, Acheh, Bantam, Makassar, Ceylon, Surat, Bandar Abbas, Mokha and the Maldives. As Golconda's most powerful official controlling all of its eastern seaboard, he was in an excellent position to further his interests in overseas trade. He had been havaldar of Masulipatnam and was

familiar with the trade of the Companies. He dealt with Portuguese, English, Dutch, and Danes, securing their assistance at various times for his voyages. Sometimes these dealings would result in conflicts and then he was able to utilize the power of the state to intimidate these European powers. Thus, when his trade to the Melaka Straits was interrupted by the Dutch and one of his ships was seized off the coast of Sri Lanka by them, he could take reprisals in Masulipatnam and win his way. He had a conflict with the English over the seizure of one of his ships in Mocha, a conflict which dragged on for a very long time and which he pursued after he had been transferred to Bengal in Mughal service. Once again the English had to settle with him by returning the vessels and paying compensation.

His dealings with the Portuguese enabled him to trade to Sri Lanka, which was held by them till 1658. It was with Portuguese help that he developed his trade to Makassar, where the Portuguese had resorted in large numbers after the loss of Melaka. He dealt with the English and Dutch, both in the import and export trade. He was a prominent buyer of copper and spices from the Dutch. He re-exported the spices to other regions. He also took over from private merchants the supply of textiles to both the English and the Dutch. In this he would have used to advantage his position as rentier of land revenues of several eastern provinces with weaving villages. It was felt by the European Company servants in Masulipatnam that Mir Jumlah's commercial domination adversely affected trade in north Coromandel. His pre-emptive buying of goods and his emergence as a supplier of goods stifled competition and put other merchants out of the market, some of whom started migrating to other ports and southwards in search of a freer trading environment. Whether this did any long term damage to trade in Masulipatnam, it is difficult to say. Other Golconda merchants continued overseas trade, and it is more likely that they came to terms, in one way or the other, with Mir Jumlah's excessive power and absorbed the costs of such accommodation.

In the second half of the seventeenth century there was growth in all these sectors of trade, which had become essential elements of Coromandel trade: Bay of Bengal trade to South East and West

Asia, European Company trade to Europe and European Company and private trade within Asia. After the failure of attempts to control the trade to Acheh and the Malay states, the Dutch had abandoned this, and though they were still parsimonious in the granting of passes, the evidence of the movement of ships from Coromandel ports shows that this did not affect the volume of shipping. Besides, with the increasing presence of the English after the establishment of Fort St George (Madras), and the greater profile adopted by the Danes, Indian merchants could apply to these powers for passes. Indeed, the trade to Acheh shows a growth in the 1660s, sailings from Masulipatnam, Devanampatnam and Porto Novo were regular, so that the Dutch gradually abandoned their trade there. The only constraints to trade in Acheh were the internal problems within that sultanate when they arose towards the end of the century. This was when the sultanate lost control of its dependencies along the coast.

Coromandel ships began to bypass Melaka totally, and traded directly with the Malay sultanates of Johore, Perak and Kedah. The sultanates encouraged this as they gradually slipped out of the web of control the Dutch had spread over them in the 1640s and 1650s. Old treaties granting exclusive trade in pepper, tin and textiles to the Dutch became a dead letter, and the Dutch found it unproductive to engage in continuous supervision of coastal waters. The expansion took place from the 1660s, when the merchants favoured places at some distance from the Dutch fort of Melaka—Kedah to the north and Johore in the southern tip of the Malay peninsula. In these states the sultans and those around them were active merchants. Coromandel merchants came into direct contact with them and merchant settlements cropped up at the estuaries of rivers. Indian merchants secured administrative positions in court, managing the rulers' trade and shipping. In the Malay sultanate, an official royal merchant (*saudagar raya*) was a manager of the sultan's trade. Indian Muslim merchants occupied this position in a few of the states. South Indian Muslims and some Hindus settled in these ports. Such settlements were to be found along the Kedah river and the Johore river.

Coromandel merchants expanded their trade through the Straits

of Melaka, eastwards to Java, the Celebes and eastern Malaya. Here the phenomenal growth of Makassar and Bantam as central points of South East Asian trade attracted them to these ports. Makassar provided access to spices in which the Dutch had declared a monopoly, enabling the sale of Indian textiles which the Dutch did not permit private traders to take to the Moluccas and other archipelago islands. In the trade to Makassar, which was carried on from Masulipatnam and from Porto Novo, merchants had the assistance of the Portuguese and the English. Portuguese trade was well developed in Makassar through private settlers who had migrated there after the fall of several Portuguese settlements. These settlers had contacts in south Coromandel through their previous residence in Nagapatnam and Porto Novo. The English also developed a trade to Makassar in search of spices which the Dutch had denied them. The English did not have capital to carry much cargo but they had shipping in the area, so they carried out a freight traffic between Coromandel ports and Makássar, carrying goods for Hindu and Muslim merchants.

An even greater centre of growth was Bantam, which took over from Acheh and Makassar after its conquest by the Dutch in 1666 as the South East Asian entrepôt. It was located in good pepper and tin-producing country and could provide spices smuggled through the Dutch blockade. Chinese merchants came there in large numbers and it became an exchange centre for Indian Ocean and China Sea trade. For the Coromandel merchants Bantam was, above all, the great export market for textiles. Now that Indian merchants could not sail to north Javanese ports, after the Dutch treaty with Mataram of 1646, they used Bantam as the conduit to supply the great Javanese and archipelago demand for Indian textiles. This was a trade the Dutch were trying to enter through their direct imports from Coromandel to Batavia. They attempted for many years to negotiate with the Sultan of Bantam, restricting access to the Javanese market of Indian commodities. But the sultan resolutely defended his right to free trade in west Java and opened his port to all and sundry. Thus the English and Danes too established a thriving trade connection here.

In the 1670s the Dutch made half-hearted attempts to control

Coromandel sailings to Bantam through passes. But Coromandel merchants used European competition to their advantage. They took passes from the English and the Danes and moved even further towards active co-operation with these two powers. With the English there were jointly-owned cargoes, freighting, and even the use of the English flag and crew on ships largely owned by Indians. There were less obtrusive forms of co-operation with Company servants of Madras and Masulipatnam under a more liberated regime of trade operated by the English after 1670. These officials entered into joint ownership of ships with merchants based in Madras, making regular sailings to Bantam. The Danes, whose trade in India floundered for long periods through lack of support from Copenhagen; seeing the opportunities of this traffic, had a number of ships constructed in the 1670s for the freighting of goods to Bantam. It seems that some of these ships were partly funded by Indian merchants. In this decade about six large ships under the Danish flag were making regular sailings from Porto Novo to Bantam, taking mainly a cargo of textiles and returning with a variety of South East Asian goods. For some of these ships there is a record: about 200 to 300 merchants would take passage with small parcels of goods for a peddling-type trade in Bantam.

There is evidence that some of these Coromandel merchants used Bantam as a base to trade to other parts of eastern Indonesia, and into the Philippines. The voyages to Manila were done probably with the help of the Portuguese, who held a favourable position there. Others seem to have been in partnership with Bantamese merchant interests, mainly those connected with the ruling families. The Sultan of Bantam had ships sailing to Coromandel ports, Masulipatnam, Madras and Porto Novo. Sometimes the English appear to have had an interest in these voyages and sometimes goods were consigned to merchants in Coromandel. In Masulipatnam the sultan had a factor stationed permanently who would get ready cargo for his ships. Contacts between the rulers of the states also helped in this commerce.

Trade to the mainland ports of South East Asia also picked up in the second half of the seventeenth century. It could well be that the problems connected with Dutch attempts to force the trade of

the Melaka Straits and the archipelago made commerce shift more towards the north, where such constraints did not apply. To an established trade to Arakan and Pegu were added the opportunities of expansion through the trans-peninsular route to Siam and Indo-Chinese kingdoms. The kingdom of Ayuthya had expanded westwards, annexed parts of lower Burma, and controlled the sea-board from the provincial capital of Tenasserim. Coromandel trade spread through this river and the land route to Bangkok and Ayuthya. Persians and Golconda Muslims settled along this route, gradually securing influential positions in the Ayuthya court. Persians and Indo-Muslims became one of the four prominent foreign merchant communities in Ayuthya and other ports. They rose to positions of influence under King Narai (1656–88) and helped the king manage his overseas trade. Ships of the King of Ayuthya and of provincial governors of Tenasserim were sailing regularly to Masulipatnam, where Golconda merchants serviced them and provided them with return cargo. The town of Tenasserim had the largest Muslim population in the country. Other Indian Muslims, mainly Chulias, were spread out in the southern tin-mining areas of Takuapa and the off-shore island of Ujang Selang. The governors of Tenasserim were Indo-Persians as was a governor of the port-town of Mergui. This overwhelming presence of Muslims seems to have edged out the Hindu shippers who, at best, sailed in small vessels.

The European Companies had attempted to enter this trade from their Coromandel factories of Madras and Paleacat but could not withstand Indian competition. They abandoned the trade to Arakan and Pegu ports after a few years of this competition. The Dutch and the English persisted with the trade to Tenasserim and Ayuthya, the Dutch attempting, with some success, to link up the Ayuthya and Japanese markets. But their attempts to enter the trade in Indian textiles in Tenasserim and Ayuthya were not successful and were abandoned. There is some evidence that Coromandel Muslims were attempting to use Ayuthya as a base to extend trading eastwards to Cochin–China and even to Japan. Some of these merchants seem to have teamed up with Chinese Muslims trading in Bangkok and experimented with shipping Indian textiles to the

south China seas. There is one instance of these Muslims sailing to Lanseng and getting permission to trade overland in Laos. Also, these merchants shipped textiles to Ligor and Patani, from where they were able to get tin in return.

European trade in Coromandel registered a sharp increase in the second half of the seventeenth century. The English, after the re-organization of their Company in 1658 and the establishment of stable administrative structures in Madras, were poised for a major growth. From the 1660s Coromandel absorbed about a third of the total investment of the English in India, which itself was steadily growing. After 1678 this investment was regularly worth over a million rupees, peaking in 1684 at about Rs 2.5 million. The great bulk of this was in the purchase of textiles. The value of imports was negligible and the balance had to be made up in bullion—silver and gold. The English were major suppliers of bullion to the Coromandel monetary system in these decades. Dutch investments also showed a steep rise in the second half of the seventeenth century, averaging about Rs 1.5 million in the 1660s, increasing to over 2 million in the 1670s, hitting a peak figure of Rs 2,800,000 in 1686. The Dutch had greater success with their import trade into Coromandel, having market dominance over the staple commodities, spices and copper. Spices did not sell as well as in Gujarat, Masulipatnam being the main market for these. With the fixing of the price of cloves, nutmeg, mace and cinnamon at very high levels after 1663, their sales in Coromandel fell. Copper on the other hand was in steady demand both for industrial purposes and for minting. They were able to finance about a third of their exports through profits from the import trade. This left very substantial amounts of over a million rupees annually to be imported in bullion from Europe and from Asian factories such as Japan. The Dutch and the English between them would have been responsible for a large proportion of the bullion imported through overseas trade into Coromandel. It is difficult to assess what proportion was brought by Indian merchants from Burma, Siam, Malaya, Acheh and Bantam. It is not surprising that rulers of Coromandel states always sought to entice European trade to their dominions with concessions.

Another element of Coromandel trade that appeared in these decades was European private trade. This was constituted of the private trade of English Company servants and freemerchants who were licenced to trade in the eastern waters. While Madras was the major port for the private trade of Company servants, freemerchants tended to favour Masulipatnam and began to settle there and in the neighbouring up-river port of Madapollam. There was a great growth in their activity in the 1670s and 1680s. They featured mainly in the Masulipatnam/Syriam/Mergui route, with establishments in Syriam and Mergui as well. The great power of European adventurers and its destablizing effects on trade were brought home through a conflict involving the Golconda state, the kingdom of Ayuthya, the English East India Company and a collection of these adventurers and freebooters. A Greek adventurer, Constans Phaulkon, had ensconced himself with the King of Ayuthya and proceeded to extirpate Persian and Indian Muslim influence in that state as well as over its trade. He appointed English freebooters, who were trading the Bay of Bengal, to influential positions in the king's ports. One of them, Samuel White, was appointed Governor of Mergui. He had with him a well-armed fleet manned by European brigands and freebooters who claimed to be acting on behalf of the King of Ayuthya. Over a dispute in the course of trade transactions in Masulipatnam, they were authorized to declare war on Golconda shipping. They proceeded to attack and pillage ships sailing from Masulipatnam to Bengal, Syriam and Mergui. Ships belonging to the Sultan of Golconda and prominent Masulipatnam merchants, including Armenians, were seized as prize over the period 1685–6. In the course of this conflict one of White's men sailed up the Narsapore river, attacking and burning the fort and dockyards. He did the same in Masulipatnam, setting fire to all buildings bordering on the river which threatened to engulf the whole city in flames. The English East India Company, fearing reprisals to its Coromandel trade, intervened and attempted a settlement between Golconda and Ayuthya. It also took steps to clear the waters of the piracy of English mercenaries.

Hardly had Masulipatnam recovered from the effects of this

turmoil than it was subjected to another violent attack, this time by the Dutch. The Dutch had attempted to get satisfaction from the Golconda authorities over a claim they made on one of their merchant brokers amounting to over Rs 700,000. When they failed in this, they decided to use force on the port. They evacuated their personnel and assets from the port and neighbouring factories. In July 1686 they made an assault on the city and seized hold of it with little resistance. They repulsed a counterattack by the governor and held on to the city for about two months. The king soon sued for peace and signed an agreement guaranteeing settlement of the merchant's debts in annual instalments, to be paid out of the revenues of the port. These two incidents, coming one after the other, exposed the weak defences of this port. The situation was different from western India, where the European powers realised that an attack on Surat would have far wider repercussions. In eastern India they could isolate and attack a port like Masulipatnam, while carrying on trade elsewhere along the coast.

There is every evidence that the Coromandel trade peaked in the 1680s. The trade of the European Companies had reached its highest volume in the entire century. Between them the English and the Dutch were investing about Rs 4 million in textiles. English private trade was picking up, mainly as a carrying trade and in partnership with Indians. The trade of Indians had become very competitive and was being driven hard from up and down the coast. Masulipatnam remained an important trading centre of the coast, reaching out to both parts of the Indian Ocean. The sultan was continuing with his investment in shipping right till the last days of the sultanate. The direct trade to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea continued, both through the royal ships and through prominent Persian and Golconda Muslim merchants. The South East Asian trade was also at its height. Masulipatnam shipping continued to Acheh, the Malay states and to Bantam, and there were the beginnings of direct sailings to Manila. The trade to Burma and Siam constituted perhaps the most significant sector. In spite of the problems of 1685–6, this trade was carried on and relations with Ayuthya were resumed. During the dominance of Phaulkon in the state of Ayuthya, the influence of Indo-Persians diminished. But

after his fall and the removal of European influence, they came back into favour and took part in the Burma/Siam Indian Ocean trade.

In the central and southern parts of Coromandel, trade, as was customary, was flowing from a number of ports scattered over the region. Paleacat had declined sharply as a port of Indian long-distance trade because of the highly restrictive policies of the Dutch. Much of this trade was attracted to Madras and San Thome after the conquest of this latter port by Golconda from the Portuguese in 1664. A lot of Hindu shipping passed through Madras in association with private English interests. In San Thome there was some collaboration with the Portuguese to sail to Manila, which is seen as a new development in Coromandel trade. It is not clear what share of this trade was Indian, English or Portuguese. Evidence from Manila shows Coromandel shipping arriving there in the 1670s in small numbers and increasing in the 1680s to an average of four to five a year. Further to the south, Cuddalore, Porto Novo and Nagore emerged as the major centres of South East Asian trade. The traditional routes were vigorously pursued—to Acheh, Bantam and the Malay states. It was noted that the trade to Bantam grew enormously, with Porto Novo as the chief centre of this trade and the home of a large Indian-owned shipping fleet. Important Chulia Muslim family syndicates arose, dominating large sectors of the South East Asian trade, with family networks spread out all over South East Asia: Syriam, Mergui and Tenasserim, Takuapa and Ujang Selang, Kedah, Perak, Johore. Nagore was becoming a subsidiary centre of their shipping. After the Dutch conquest of Nagapatnam in 1659, trade moved away from this port because of the restrictive policies in the issue of passes. Nagore, which had earlier been a satellite port of Nagapatnam, now became home-port for Chulia shipping.

Another feature of Coromandel trade that should not be neglected is the coastal trade of eastern India and the short-distance trade across the straits to Sri Lanka and the Malabar coast. The trade from and to Bengal was done in large vessels and picked up during the course of the seventeenth century, with Bengal becoming a place for cheap rice imports whenever the Coromandel coast was threatened with shortages. Also, Bengal goods for Indian Ocean

trade were brought in this way to Masulipatnam and Porto Novo for reshipment. The rice trade was also carried on from Orissa and Andhra ports, southwards to the Madras/Paleacat area where there were always rice shortages. This coastal trading in small barges appears to have been largely in the hands of Hindus. The trade covering south Coromandel, the Bay of Madura, the ports of Sri Lanka and south Malabar was even more brisk. This was a trade in essential consumer goods and deeply affected the lives of people of these areas. Tanjore and Tinnevely were providers of rice to Sri Lanka and Malabar. The whole area upto Tinnevely provided textiles to Sri Lanka and Malabar. In return came pepper and spices from Malabar, betel nuts, elephants and cinnamon from Sri Lanka, and coconut produce from both regions. This was a small-boat traffic carried out from a number of major and minor ports by Chulia Muslims and Hindus. The rulers of Tanjore and Madura had interests in the trade and worked through the merchants who had contacts with the kings of Kandy and the nobles, and with the princes of south Malabar.

The Dutch attempted to control this trade to Sri Lanka and Malabar when they annexed the coastal Sri Lanka and Malabar ports of Cochin and Quilon from the Portuguese. They closed the ports of the King of Kandy and directed the trade to Dutch ports of Colombo, Galle and Jaffna through passes, levying heavy duties on goods that they wanted to trade in. Allowing the rice trade relatively free, they prohibited the textile, betel nut and cinnamon trade on private vessels. In Malabar they prohibited the private transport of pepper and spices. These restrictions were in force for about twenty years from 1660 to 1680, but were found to be a thorough failure. They were unable to take over the market in textiles. The real effect was a downturn in the volume of trade, causing serious shortages in rice supply in their Sri Lankan colony, opposition from the community and disputes with rulers of the region—the King of Kandy, the Nayaks of Madura and Tanjore, the Rajah of Ramnad and the rulers of Malabar. The pepper trade from south Malabar to Coromandel could not be controlled, and any shortfalls in the sea traffic were made up by overland transport from Malabar to Coromandel. Smuggling was rife and cruising of

the Straits had to be constant. Towards the end of the century many of these restrictions were removed, the Indo-Sri Lankan trade resumed, as was the Coromandel-Malabar trade, though not on its previous scale, because some of the prohibitions such as the transport of cinnamon were rigorously maintained. There is no doubt that some long-term damage was done to the trade and to coastal economies, and some of the ports of Sri Lanka and of the Bay of Madura, which had been small-scale centres of activity, declined into oblivion and neglect.

As contrasted with the activity that is evident upto the 1680s, it appears that the last decade of the seventeenth century saw a decline. The evidence is not uniform in this. Difficulties to the Coromandel trading system appeared on many fronts. The major event of these years was the expansion of the Mughal empire southwards and the annexation of Golconda and Bijapur in 1686–7. The succeeding years were attended by continuing conflict, while the new rulers sought to consolidate their hold on the resources of the conquered territories and were opposed by local powers entrenched in the land. In north Coromandel there was conflict through the 1690s in the Andhra lowlands, with Hindu rajahs and zamindars furiously contesting Mughal imposition. Masulipatnam lost its profitable connection with the capital city of Golconda and with the power structure there. The roads themselves were in a state of insecurity, and transport was seriously interrupted. The port was not given time to recover from a succession of crises in 1686 to 1687, among which was a succession of two years of failed monsoons, followed by a pestilence that killed many, and a great fire in May 1687 which destroyed the best residential areas of the city. To the south the damage was even worse. The southern penetration of the Mughals brought the Mughal–Maratha war to the south. The rich hinterland areas of Madras were hotly contested between the Mughals and the Maratha ruler, who had ensconced himself in the impregnable fort of Senji. There was an exhausting eight-year war fought between them before the Mughals could consolidate their hold on eastern Karnatak. In the process, rich agricultural areas and weaving villages of Kanchipuram, Madurantakam and Chingleput had been laid waste and depopulated. As the war spilt over further

south towards the Tanjore border, the hinterland of the ports of Cuddalore and Porto Novo were affected, again creating difficulties in the provision of textiles. The widespread disruption of agriculture caused food shortages and steep increases in the price of foodgrains, which had an impact on all other prices. This was the beginning of an upward movement in the price of textiles in central and south Coromandel which made these regions lose their cost advantages in the textiles markets of the Indian Ocean.

An index to this downturn in economic activity was the decline in investment made by the two European Companies in Coromandel. English purchases had peaked in the years 1683–7 and dropped markedly from 1688 onwards. Throughout the 1690s, with the exception of 1699, they never went beyond Rs 400,000, often being less than Rs 100,000. Dutch trade figures confirm this trend. Investment on exports, after peaking in 1686 (*c.* Rs 2,800,000), fell sharply in 1688 to less than Rs 100,000, the lowest figure for over half a century. It rose slowly in the 1690s but always less than a million rupees. A similar depressed condition is seen in the Dutch import trade where profit dropped from a high of around Rs 500,000 to consistently low levels of upto Rs 200,000 in the 1690s. The chief factor here was the loss of access to the Dutch factory at Golconda, where the bulk of the imports were sold, after the Mughal conquest.

A severe blow to Coromandel trade was the fall of Bantam to the Dutch in 1684 and the incorporation of that port into the Dutch monopoly system. The European and Indian trade of that port was quickly dismantled and Indians lost access to a vital centre of South East Asian trade. With Acheh on a course of decline, and Makassar under the Dutch, Indians had no free distribution point for textiles or a point of access to South East Asian export commodities. Coromandel merchants had to adopt strategies of survival, having lost their entry into the populous Javanese market. Their trade now hovered around the northern part of the Melaka Straits, exploring further the markets of Malay states and concentrating on the mainland states of Burma and Siam, which were themselves subject to instability. The survivors were those who had network connections in South East Asia, in the Malay states. The only

Coromandel merchant groups with such surviving networks were the Tamil Muslims of the south. The Golconda Muslims had lost their influential connections. Hindu networks had not been maintained.

6

The Trade of Bengal

The Mughal conquest of Bengal and the consolidation of its authority over the entire province was a lengthy process lasting almost a century from the 1570s. It made a material difference to Bengal's commercial development and helped to integrate this commerce closer with the rest of the subcontinent. This integration was particularly marked and achieved swifter overland, to the interior provinces of Bihar, Awadh and the mid-Gangetic plains. The opening of Bengal by sea was rather slower, partly because of the preoccupation of the Mughals with the eastern and north-eastern frontiers, partly because of the nature of the terrain in the delta country which hindered the easy movement of Mughal armed power to these regions. Because of this difficult terrain, resistance by local princes and chieftains, most of them Hindus, was more effective. Occupying a delta country covered by rivers and creeks, these rulers had mobilized effective seapower suitable to these waters, and the Mughals took long to develop offensive seapower of their own. The speed of Mughal consolidation was further delayed by the presence of two external elements. One was the rulers of Arakan who had developed a strong naval power in this part of the Bay of Bengal, with the ability to sail upstream of rivers and strike deep into the hinterland. They were allied to a race of sturdy seagoing fighters, the Maghs, rather like the Bugis of the Celebes, who put their resources at the disposal of the Arakan rulers and between them terrorized the Burma/Bengal border country for about a century.

The second external element was the Portuguese, whose increasing unofficial presence in the Bay of Bengal was noted in Chapter II. This presence appears to have intensified in the last decades of the sixteenth century into the first three decades of the seventeenth, with some official recognition by the Portuguese Crown and the *Estado* with its seat in Goa. Portuguese casados flocked to the delta

ports of Bengal and to Burma as settlers engaged in legitimate trading and as freebooters, slave-raiders and mercenaries. Their expertise as mercenaries—as marines and as gunners in the militia—were recognized by a number of rulers, including the kings of Arakan, numerous Hindu rajas of delta districts, and even Mughal generals who were fighting both these elements. The Portuguese carried out legitimate trading and freebooting activities from a number of ports. One of their major ports of settlement was Chittagong, which had been annexed by the King of Arakan and remained under his control till 1660. Some men settled in the Burmese port of Syriam, some in the delta port of Dianga which was also under Arakan control. The main island of Sandwip at the estuary of the Meghna was another port of Portuguese settlement. Further to the east of the delta they befriended the local rulers and settled in the port of Satgaon, on the banks of the Saraswati. When the Portuguese settled there this river was easily navigable to sea-going ships upto the Adi-Ganga, which was the outlet to the sea.

Contemporary observers speak of Chittagong and Satgaon as the chief centres of Portuguese trade and settlement in Bengal—Chittagong the Porto Grande (great port) and Satgaon the Porto Pequeno (little port). In Chittagong and Sandwip they had substantial armed naval power from which they launched attacks on shipping in alliance with the Arakanese. In Satgaon were the more peaceful settler merchants with semi-permanent residences which moved, according to the season or the tides, up and down the river. In all places the Portuguese established customs houses and taxed trade. They would probably have issued cartazes to Bengali shipping plying in and out of the delta ports. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the river Saraswati silted up and it became impossible for the larger vessels to exit to the sea through Adi-Ganga. Consequently, merchants began to abandon the port of Satgaon for other ports on the Bhagirathi river. In 1576 Akbar granted to Pedro Tavares, the chief of the Portuguese settlers of Satgaon, a farman to settle in Hughli, and Portuguese merchants as well as Indians transferred to this port or to others lower down the Hughli river. Hughli soon replaced Satgaon and grew as a major port of Bengal trade. Portuguese houses were built on both banks of the river and they

established a customs house authorized by the emperor to collect customs duties from shipping of the port.

In the early years of the seventeenth century, the freebooter element of Portuguese presence in Bengal asserted itself for a time. One of these was Domingo Carvalho, who was a mercenary to the ruler of Sripur and conquered Sandwip on his behalf from the King of Arakan in 1602. There ensued a stormy and adventurous career of battles fought against Arakan and the Mughal forces, defending himself and the masters he served till he was put to death through some Byzantine intrigue involving several rulers. Another was Sabastiao Gonzales Tibau, who set himself up as a freebooter around 1607, operating from Dianga. He preyed on shipping of the Arakan coast and gained control of the island of Sandwip in 1609 after defeating its ruler, Fath Khan. He maintained his position in Sandwip and attracted a strong following of Portuguese, Maghs and Arakanese. He won some spectacular battles against the Mughals. His successes made him more ambitious and he made a proposal to the Viceroy at Goa for a joint attack on Arakan to annex that coast for the Portuguese crown. The Viceroy agreed and sent a fleet in 1615 which made a joint attack on Arakan. The Arakanese had in the meanwhile been able to secure Dutch assistance and the Portuguese fleet was routed. The King of Arakan retook Sandwip, drove the Portuguese from there, and Gonzales disappeared from the scene.

Side by side with the militant and destructive elements of Portuguese presence in Bengal, their trading activities grew in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Their trade was centred mainly on Hughli, with smaller settlements of traders in Dianga, Pipeli, Hijli and in Syriam on the Burma coast. The evidence of Bengal trade during these years comes overwhelmingly from Portuguese sources and, as noted in a previous chapter, there is a tendency in the historiography to support assumptions of Portuguese dominance over this trade. There is no doubt of the strong Portuguese participation in this trade, as is evident from the large merchant colonies and the volume of shipping. Sources talk of twenty to forty ships trading from Hughli. How much of this shipping was Indian is a doubtful issue. During the Bengal sultanate

period, certain lines of Bengal trade, linking it to Indian Ocean trade, had been firmly established. Hindu rajas of the delta region, who were allied to the Portuguese, would have been favoured with permission to carry on trade under Portuguese protection. There is no need to assume that the Portuguese took over the entire trade and handled it themselves. It should be remembered that many of the settler merchants were small-timers operating on low capital.

One consequence of the intensified Portuguese involvement was to integrate the trade of Bengal closer to that of the *Estado*. Direct Portuguese voyages from Goa and Cochin to Bengal ports were undertaken both by the Crown and its concessionaries and by private settlers. The voyages from and to Malabar were particularly significant. They brought pepper direct from Malabar to Bengal markets, as well as other Malabar spices and coconut produce. In return they took back Bengal rice and opium, both commodities in great demand in Malabar. It is difficult to say whether these direct sailings between Malabar ports and Bengal were an innovation or whether they had already been engaged in by Bengal and Malabar merchants to the non-Portuguese ports of Calicut and Cannanore. This is likely, but the Portuguese activities would have increased the volume of traffic and made the voyages more direct, while Indian voyages would probably have called at other ports on the way—Coromandel, Sri Lanka, Maldives. Portuguese involvement also would have increased the direct trade between Bengal and Sri Lanka, which the Portuguese held from the last part of the sixteenth century. This would certainly not have been an innovation, as the Bengal trade to that island had a history rooted deep in the past. In the early decades of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were liberally providing passes to Bengal merchants to their ports of Colombo and Galle. This was for the export of rice and other foodstuffs, and to bring back elephants, arecanuts and cinnamon. Portuguese settlers in Bengal were also trading to the Coromandel coast settlements of Nagapatnam, Porto Novo and San Thome, but they were doing this in competition with Indians who had long been entrenched in this trade. Finally, the Portuguese encouraged direct Bengal trade with Melaka, but again they were only reopening old trading contacts of the Sultanate period. Now

they were encouraging Bengal merchants to sail to Melaka instead of to other South East Asian ports, with a view to reviving the trade of Melaka.

The Portuguese were instrumental in expanding the slave trade of the Bay of Bengal by increasing the supply of slaves, and by opening central markets for slaves in their Bengal and Burma settlements. They did this in conjunction with the Arakanese. A number of Portuguese freebooters settled in the Bengal ports were engaged in slave raiding, starting with the last two decades of the sixteenth century and going into the first three decades of the seventeenth. Chittagong, Dianga, Sandwip, Hughli and Pipeli became slave markets during these years. The slaves were from the Surdabans, captured in war or during slave-raids by parties of Portuguese, Arakanese and Maghs. Special row boats or *jelias* were designed for this; they were able to sail into shallow creeks and make lightening raids on defenceless villages along the banks. Men, women and children were carried away and sold as slaves in the markets mentioned above. This unsavoury reputation achieved by the Portuguese in Bengal was one of the major reasons why Shah Jehan ordered his subahdar of Bengal, Quasim Khan, to attack and expel the Portuguese from Hughli.

It appears that in the early decades of the seventeenth century, as the produce of Bengal became more desired in Asia, the overseas trade of Bengal became more diversified. This trade was initiated both from Bengal and from other ports which could serve as distributors of Bengal's produce. The Golconda port of Masulipatnam emerged as such a port where Bengal muslins, silks and sugar were brought for re-export to different regions. Participants in this trade were wealthy Persian and Golconda Muslims who forged links with the domiciled Muslim merchants of Bengal, some of whom were also Persians. Two major areas of re-export of Bengal's goods were the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, to which places the Golconda merchants were carrying an expanding trade. When the first European Companies appeared in the Bay of Bengal, they were reluctant to sail northwards to the Bengal/Burma coasts. These waters had a reputation in the Ocean for Portuguese and Arakan piracy, and both the Dutch and the English did not want to expose

their weak Bay shipping to such piracy. So the English, Dutch and Danes, right up till the 1630s, got whatever Bengal goods they wanted from Masulipatnam. It was the Danes who first ventured into Bengal and received permission from the Nawab of Bengal to establish a factory in Pipeli.

In 1632 the Mughal emperor ordered the subahdar of Bengal to expel the Portuguese from Hughli. This was successfully achieved and several Portuguese were captured and enslaved. Others fled to neighbouring ports and kept a low profile. In the following year many Portuguese merchants were allowed to return in a deliberate attempt to develop Hughli as a chief port of Bengal trade. Hughli was now under Mughal administration, under the control of an imperially-appointed fausdar, and its revenues forwarded directly to the emperor. After the expulsion of the Portuguese, other Europeans were encouraged to make direct voyages to Bengal and sought concessions from the Mughal subahdar. The Dutch were allowed to settle a factory in 1632 and the English in 1636. The English preferred to settle their factory in Balesore, a port which now grew, after the fear of Portuguese blockades was removed. Large vessels could anchor safely below the heads loading and unloading goods in small boats which could enter the river for most of the year. By contrast, Hughli had to be reached by sailing about 125 miles up the Ganges. A knowledgeable pilot was necessary to negotiate these waters.

With the removal of the Portuguese, Bengal shipping was also freer to sail along the coast to Burma and Siam. This was a natural area of trade for Bengal merchants with short sailing distances and familiar waters. A number of commodities could be traded in on the outward and return voyages. Bengal butter, edible oils, opium, saltpetre, cotton and silk textiles sold well in Burmese and Siamese markets. The imports were pepper, tin, copper, elephants and ivory, timber and Chinese porcelain. Bengal merchants caught up here with East Asian goods such as porcelain and copper. As the kingdoms of Pegu and Ayuthya expanded southwards and westwards in the seventeenth century, their Bay of Bengal ports were opened upto traders from India, and Bengalis were in a good position to tap into this trade. When Muslims from other parts of

India settled in the ports of Syriam, Tavoy, Tenasserim and Mergui, Bengal Muslim merchants were able to forge permanent links with them. Thus the Burma/Siam trade of Bengal continued as a strong foundation of Bengal's overseas trade in the seventeenth century.

In this period there is no definite evidence of the nature and course of Bengal's trade to the Malay peninsula and the South East Asian islands of the archipelago through the Straits of Melaka. Bengal's textiles and silks were in demand in the upper, luxury end of the market. They did not reach down towards popular consumption, as did those of Coromandel. On the other hand Bengal rice was always in demand in the Malay and Sumatran states, where there was a shortage of rice. They also looked to Bengal for other foodstuffs like butter, edible oils and long pepper. Opium from Bengal became an increasingly saleable commodity in South East Asia in this period. In return, these states produced a variety of commodities demanded by Bengal. The pepper, abundant in these parts, was always in demand in Bengal and deep in the hinterland. This was also the case with tin. Elephants and ivory from Malaya and north Sumatra were also important import commodities. South East Asian gold was another profitable commodity to take back. It was also here that they procured the spices of the Moluccas—cloves, nutmeg and mace—that sold in small quantities in Bengal. As in Burma and Siam, Bengal merchants were able to take back Japanese and Chinese commodities, mainly copper, porcelain, camphor and tutenaque. Gum, gumlak and a variety of dyes found all over South East Asia were also import commodities.

Bengal merchants traded with the Malay states of Kedah and Johore, and very heavily with the sultanate of Acheh. It is not clear whether they sailed through the straits of Melaka to east Sumatra and north Javanese ports, as they most certainly did two or three centuries earlier. The limited demand for Bengal textiles in these parts, and the restricted demand for spices in Bengal, may have made these voyages not so profitable. Whereas, in the ports and territories on the western end of the archipelago, there were conditions for a favourable exchange of what Bengal and these lands produced. A feature that made this trade profitable was the burgeoning demand for elephants in the seventeenth century for service

in the Mughal army. After the reduction of the Portuguese and the decrease of piracy along the Bengal coast, this shipping could freely sail in and out of the ports. Just at the same time as the trade of Golconda and Coromandel to mainland and island South East Asia was expanding, there is seen, as part of this process of the growth in Bay of Bengal trade, an increase of trade from Bengal in this direction, a feature observed by the Dutch when they began to concentrate their attention on Bengal.

The trade with Sri Lanka, established during the years of Portuguese presence and influence in Bengal, continued and grew even after their expulsion. The Portuguese held on to the ports of Colombo and Jaffna, to which Bengal merchants sailed, till 1658. The Dutch blockade of the Portuguese ports in Sri Lanka and on the Malabar coast was a hindrance to this trade and sometimes caused problems between the Dutch and Bengal shipowners. The Bengalis took passes from the Dutch as well as the Portuguese, assuring safe conduct, and sometimes were also able to cover Portuguese trade in this way. The Dutch had taken the southern port of Galle in 1640, after which Bengali ships touched on Galle with Dutch passes. The elephants of Sri Lanka were the major attraction of this trade and, with the great demand in Bengal for these animals, they were being exported both from the Portuguese port of Jaffna in the north and the Dutch port of Galle in the south. Ships sailing into Sri Lanka brought large quantities of Bengal rice and other foodstuffs such as sugar, butter and edible oils. The Sri Lankan coastal communities began to depend on the regular imports of Bengal rice for their sustenance. Bengal merchants also traded with the King of Kandy, through his eastern port of Batticaloa and Kottiyar. They sold him, among other things, saltpetre, which he needed desperately for his wars against the Portuguese. He sold them elephants and cinnamon which he secretly transported to the east coast without being detected by the Portuguese, who had declared a monopoly in that commodity.

Evidence on direct trade between Bengal and Surat and West Asia is even more fragmentary. It is difficult to trace its growth in the early decades of the seventeenth century but whatever evidence there is leads to the speculation that this trade was initiated from

Surat with the expansion of trade between that port and the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. As Bengal fine muslins, silks and sugar grew in demand in north-western India, Persia and Arabia, Surat merchants expanded their operations to include Bengal into their trade networks. It is possible that it was then that Gujarat's Banya families migrated to Bengal to initiate trade in Bengal goods from that province. Also participating in the trade were the large-scale Muslim shippers of Gujarat—Arabs, Turks and Persians—some of whom also established residence in Bengal. Whatever the case may be, by the middle of the century the direct trade between Bengal and Gujarat was well in train, carrying Bengal goods for Arabian Sea markets and bringing back in return cotton, indigo, Malabar pepper and Gujarati varieties of textiles not made in Bengal.

At the same time the coastal trade between Bengal and the Coromandel coast was also growing. Masulipatnam became an important Coromandel centre of this trade, and Persian and other Muslim merchants of Golconda established links with Bengal merchants and state officials. The trade embraced several ports along the coastline, from Balesore and Pipeli to the ports of Orissa, north, central and south Coromandel. The growth of Masulipatnam as an entrepôt for Bengal goods in Coromandel was noted above. With the establishment of Madras in 1641 and its subsequent growth, this port also became a centre for the Bengal trade. Further to the south, San Thome, Porto Novo and Nagapatnam, when they were under Portuguese control, also featured in the trade to Bengal. After the withdrawal of the Portuguese, Porto Novo continued as a centre for the Bengal trade. Most of this trade seems to have been initiated from the Coromandel ports rather than from Bengal. The strength of Coromandel trade was in its numerous small and medium-scale operations, with their vessels geared to the type of trade that embraced rice and a variety of foodstuffs. Bengal lacked this large base of petty shipowners and did not enjoy the large coastal fleet that was to be found in every major Coromandel port.

Rice from Bengal was the staple of this trade, and it is from this period that the great dependence of Coromandel on Bengal rice appears to begin. This is partly explained by the growth of some of the Coromandel ports as population centres relying on imported

foodgrains. From the second decade of the seventeenth century Masulipatnam had a rapidly expanding population in the port and suburbs. Paleacat grew under the Dutch, though not markedly, yet requiring a steady supply of imported rice. Then there was Madras with a phenomenal growth from the 1660s. Further to the south there was Cuddalore and Porto Novo. Normally, these ports would have been supplied from their hinterlands, which were good rice-producing areas. But several years in the seventeenth century were abnormal years, subject to a succession of food crises caused by climatic factors, warfare and unpredictable tariff barriers in interior roads. Bengal and Orissa rice had the great advantage of its low cost and, given the low transport costs in the specially constructed paddy barges and the low profit margins required by merchants, it undersold the local rice. The regular shipping enabled the import of a variety of other foodstuffs desired in Coromandel: butter, sesame oil, mustard and mustard oil, cumin seed, corriander, long pepper, *kumkum*, etc.

Bengal fine muslins and silk were saleable in moderate quantities to the elite of the major states of the area—Golconda, Bijapur, Thanjavur and Madura. Golconda had the largest consumption of these through the port of Masulipatnam. From Masulipatnam, Madras, Porto Novo and Nagapatnam, Bengal textiles were re-exported to South East Asia and to the Persian Gulf by a variety of Coromandel merchants. Thus, commodities in the coastal trade had a role in the long-distance trade. It is interesting to note that Bengal powder sugar, which caught on during this period in Gujarat and West Asia, did not have any large sale in Coromandel. It could not penetrate the consumer taste of the region, which stuck to a variety of palm sugars produced locally, and candy sugar. There was no great demand for Bengal opium along the coast and in the interior. Silk yarn from Bengal fed the textile industry of central Coromandel, which wove fine silk and mixed silk and cotton sarees, shawls and dress materials for luxury consumption.

These merchants imported a variety of goods into Bengal, locally produced and brought from other regions. Pepper, cinnamon from Sri Lanka, and spices from South East Asia, whenever these were available, were a part of the cargo. Indigo was taken for

the Bengal dyeing industry. From Masulipatnam, salt formed an important and profitable part of the cargo. Some varieties of Coromandel textiles were in demand in Bengal. The coarse weaves found a market with the poorer classes, and painted chintzes, for which parts of Coromandel were famous, were also taken. In the southern areas of the Bay of Madura, the chanks that were fished there were desired in Bengal for a making of bangles and amulets. These were exported in large quantities from the southern ports.

From the 1630s is noted a more intensive participation by Mughal officials of Bengal in sea-borne trade. It is not known how far back this went, but it appears that when the Mughals took control of the port of Hughli and the approach waters of the delta were cleared of Portuguese piracy, officials began to come forward to invest in commerce. There was activity in shipbuilding, both in Hughli and in Balesore. A number of the senior officials of the Subah are recorded as owning and operating ships. The Viceroy, Prince Mohammed Shuja, who held this position from 1639 to 1660, was the most prominent of these. Other officials who appear in the records by name or by office are the Nawab of Cuttack, the Nawab of Dacca, the Dewan of Orissa, the Havaldar of Hughli, and the Shahbandars of Hughli and Balesore. Mir Jumlah, who succeeded Prince Shuja as Subahdar, was of course a great merchant who brought his extensive commercial empire from Golconda. After him, Subahdar Shaista Khan continued this tradition. The ships of the nobility were engaged in long-distance trading. They sailed to all the regions noted above, as trade relationships with Bengal developed. Their ships sailed to Syriam, Tenasserim on the Burma/Siam coast, and to Kedah and Malacca on the Malay coast. Acheh was a popular trading port for their ships. Here officials established diplomatic links with the rulers of Acheh. Their ships sailed to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Malabar, Surat and Bandar Abbas. Among the goods they brought back were elephants from Siam, Malaya, Acheh and Sri Lanka, which added to their military capacity and their prestige.

In the chapters on Gujarat and Coromandel it was noted that Indian trade from these parts of South East Asia was obstructed by the Dutch after their conquest of Melaka in 1641. They attempted

a similar policy towards Bengal trade, forcing Bengal ships to take out passes which would oblige these to call at Melaka, where they had to pay heavy duties on goods they carried from the neighbouring ports of Kedah and Acheh. The Dutch did this on the pretext of being at war with Acheh, in pursuance of which they had imposed a blockade on this port. As in Gujarat and Coromandel, the merchants and the officials who were affected by this restriction fought vigorously against it. The Viceroy, Prince Shuja, had a personal interest in freeing the trade. The officials kept harassing the Dutch Company servants in Chinsura and Pipeli for passes and safe conduct for their ships to South East Asia. When any interference in the South East Asian ports was reported, they threatened reprisals against Dutch trade in Bengal. On one occasion in 1654, Mughal forces threatened to overrun the Company's factory in Pipeli for denying passes to Bengal ships. Dutch trade in Bengal was expanding fast and they did not wish to jeopardize this trade. So their servants in Bengal were forced to grant passes to Tenasserim, Acheh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and ensure that Bengal shipping was not harassed. From the 1660s the Dutch were unable to impose any restrictions on Bengal's long-distance shipping.

From the middle decades of the seventeenth century the trade of Europeans in Bengal increased phenomenally and contributed to an increase in production for export in the riverine tracts of the province. The Dutch established a factory in Pipeli in 1636, another in Hughli in 1645, and later opened up inland factories in production centres. The English first traded from Balesore, and in 1650 opened a factory in Hughli. The Danes had a factory in Balesore which they occupied intermittently. They were engaged in a running dispute with the Bengal government over a claim for compensation for damage to their factory. They Portuguese were allowed to return as merchants and settlers and operated from Hughli and Pipeli. It was the Dutch who saw the most phenomenal expansion of their trade and investment in Bengal, and who had the deepest impact on the Bengal economy. Because of their excellent and methodical record-keeping, their trade trends can be followed from year to year and from region to region. We also have the advantage

of an admirable analysis of this material by Om Prakash, from whose conclusions much of the succeeding material is drawn.

Dutch trade in Bengal divides itself into two sectors—the Asia–Europe and the intra-Asia trade. The total value of Dutch exports from Bengal in both these sectors of trade increased sharply from the 1650s, from around Rs 150,000 to 160,000 per year at first to Rs 1,000,000, and kept on increasing in the 1660s to 1690s till it reached the highest figure for the century of Rs 2,400,000 in 1692. Upto the last two decades of the seventeenth century, the larger share of Dutch investment in Bengal was in goods for the Asia sector of the trade. It was only from the 1680s that the proportions changed and the European demand took up over 80 per cent of the total investment. The three major items of Dutch export to Europe were textiles, raw silk and saltpetre, with the first two forming by far the largest proportion throughout the century. Raw silk was rather more important than textiles till the 1670s, while textiles rose rapidly during the last two decades. The Dutch switched from Persia to Bengal for their raw silk because of the cheapness of the latter. Likewise, the good profits fetched by cotton and silk textiles of Bengal in Europe made them increase the orders from Bengal starting with the 1650s. Bengal saltpetre also produced high profits in Europe, especially during years of war as in the 1660s, and annually two to three million pounds were ordered.

The significance of Bengal in Europe–Asia trade was dramatically extended in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, with a sharp increase in demand for cotton and silk textiles in Europe. This affected the trade of both the Dutch and the English. During this period Bengal became the chief supplier of raw silk to the Netherlands, surpassing Persia and competing successfully with Chinese raw silk. From about 1680 the demand from the Netherlands for fine cotton, silk and mixed cotton and silk piece-goods was increased at the expense of coarse cotton goods, and consequently Bengal became more important than Coromandel in the trade of the Dutch Company. As this change in demand for textiles took shape, diverse categories of fine muslins were ordered for Europe, not merely those in the high price range but also those of

lower quality and cheaper price. This was accompanied by a further increase in demand for Bengal raw silk, hence an increase in the value of Dutch investment in Bengal to over Rs 2,000,000. The expansion continued in the 1690s and into the early decades of the eighteenth century. Bengal became the most important trading centre for the Dutch in India, surpassing the three other regions of Gujarat, Malabar and Coromandel put together. The growth of Bengal trade was at the expense of Dutch investment in Coromandel and Gujarat, both of which regions saw, in the 1690s, political and civil instability which affected production, transport and prices. In Coromandel the price of coarse and fine goods increased and could not compete with what Bengal could offer in price and quality. The Dutch switched to Bengal even for the procurement of ordinary cotton goods. Often, supply could not keep up with demand. The increased demand had the inevitable result of decline in quality and rise in price.

An important characteristic of Dutch trade in Bengal was its use of Bengal as a lever in its inter-Asian trade. Studies of the VOC's commercial operations have shown that, from the first two or three decades of the seventeenth century, the Company's directors took a deliberate decision to transfer capital from Europe to Asia with a view to promoting an aggressive participation in trade within Asia. They did this both by a policy of coercion, utilizing naval and military power wherever possible, to dominate certain sectors of the trade, and by participating competitively in open trading areas, and by following the market. Besides the diversion of capital, shipping capacity within Asia was augmented by the longer stay in Asia of the East Indiamen that came from Europe, and by having ships constructed in Asian dockyards for this purpose. From the 1630s the volume of Dutch trade within Asia expanded and produced profits, which were then reinvested in goods for shipment to Europe. The profitability of this trade went on expanding till the 1680s, when it levelled out and began to decline from the second decade of the eighteenth century.

Bengal was a major component of this trade strategy. Soon the Dutch began to exploit the saleability of Bengal goods in various Asian markets. Some of these were markets that had traditionally

been tapped by Asian merchants, others were the result of Dutch innovative enterprise. The most crucial of these was the Japan trade, which became a sheet anchor of Dutch trade from Bengal through the middle decades of the seventeenth century. When the Dutch were permitted to settle a factory in Hirado in 1609, and with the expulsion of the Portuguese from Japan in 1639, they got themselves into a key situation as the only Europeans allowed to trade in that kingdom. Japan had always been an excellent market for Chinese silk and now the Dutch, utilizing their position in Bengal and Japan, began to push very successfully the sale of Bengal silk to Japan. From 1640 the amount of Bengal raw silk exported to Japan grew. The growth was accelerated from 1656 when, upto 1682, 150,000 to 226,000 Dutch pounds of raw silk were exported annually. Bengal textiles and silk piecegoods and sugar were also taken to Japan, but in much smaller quantities. In return the Dutch imported silver and gold from Japan into Bengal. Over 80 per cent of the precious metal imported into Bengal by the Dutch for their trade came from Japan. Japanese bar copper was imported but did not sell as well as in Coromandel or Gujarat till about 1680. After this year the quantities sold shot upto between 200,000 and 500,000 Dutch pounds per year.

After 1686 the Dutch trade between Bengal and Japan declined sharply, mainly because of regulations imposed in 1685 by the Japanese authorities. Restrictions on the total value of Dutch trade in Japan and on the export of bullion sharply curtailed the value of imports into Japan. There were also restrictions on the amount of copper that could be taken out of Japan. The export of raw silk from Bengal dropped in the 1690s to around 50,000 pounds, and though there was an attempt to compensate by increasing exports of cotton and silk piece goods, the total value was nowhere near the value they had had in the peak years of the 1670s and 1680s. The decline in Japanese precious metal imported into Bengal was compensated for by the direct import of bullion from Europe. As noted above, the decline in exports to Japan was simultaneous with a spurt in exports to Europe. European bullion was necessary to provide the purchasing power for these exports.

The Dutch trade of Bengal with other regions of Asia fitted in

more with the traditional patterns of Asian trade, with the difference that the Dutch took advantage of the dominant position they had secured for themselves by coercive means in certain sectors of the trade. Apart from these sectors, the Dutch found themselves in competition with Asian trade driven by Asian merchants. The Dutch participated in the Bengal trade within South East Asia in the traditional commodities of this trade. The major difference was that, by the middle of the seventeenth century, they had succeeded in monopolizing the supply of spices—nutmeg, cloves and mace—and they became the sole sellers of these in Bengal, as in other parts of India. Bengal was not, however, a major market for these spices. The quantities sold in Bengal were much less than sales in Surat, for Gujarat, and in Masulipatnam, for Golconda. In the period 1678 to 1684, annual average sale of these spices were: cloves 5573 pounds, nutmeg 4475 pounds and mace 955 pounds. After the conquest of Sri Lanka in 1658, the Dutch also became monopolists of cinnamon, which they sold exclusively in Bengal. But again the quantities were small—in the above period 368 pounds annually. Considering that when Bengal's trade to Sri Lanka was free, larger quantities had been imported to Bengal by Indian and Portuguese merchants, it is a safe assumption that a large supply of inferior cinnamon from Malabar at much lower prices must have reached Bengal. As for the other spices, it is possible that the very high prices fixed by the Dutch pushed consumption down.

In traditional Asian trade, Bengal cotton and silk textiles had featured in exports to South East Asia. The Dutch sought to enter into this trade, using the captive market that they had seized by the end of the seventeenth century. But they did not have the market knowledge or the networks that Asians had, and the quantities sold were always smaller. Towards the end of the century, when the Coromandel textile production was in turmoil and costs were high, there was a spurt in Dutch exports of Bengal textiles to the Indonesian archipelago. An article of profitable export was opium, which too had featured in the trade of Asian merchants at the time that they had free access to the islands of the archipelago. Now the Dutch imposed a monopoly on the import of opium in Java, the east coast of Sumatra, the Celebes and the Moluccas. Batavia be-

came the major wholesale market for Bengal opium, from where Malay and Chinese traders redistributed it in small boats to the far-flung parts of the archipelago. The quantities exported in the second half of the century fluctuated from a low of 3000 pounds a year to a high of 190,000 pounds in 1698. Besides these trade commodities, the Dutch exported Bengal rice, butter, salted pork and edible oils for the consumption of their forts and settlements in Java, Melaka and Sri Lanka. For the other import commodities, such as pepper, tin, lead and spelter, the Dutch had to compete with Indians and English. They tried to enter without success the import trade in elephants, which was overwhelmingly in the hands of Bengal and Golconda merchants.

The Dutch entered the trade of Bengal with other regions of India and with West Asia in competition with Indian merchants as well as the with English and Portuguese. With Malabar, the Dutch traded in pepper and opium, having to compete in both with Asian merchants. The Dutch sought to enter the trade between Bengal and the Persian Gulf ports in textiles and sugar. Substantial quantities of sugar were exported to Persia in the second half of the seventeenth century, varying between 400,000 pounds to 1,400,000 pounds. The profit margins of Bengal sugar were great. But towards the end of the century the quantities tapered down as the Dutch developed an expanding sugar culture in Java and gave preference to exporting Javanese sugar to Surat and West Asia. The trade in textiles from Bengal to the Persian Gulf was much more competitive, and there were wide fluctuations depending on market conditions, the attitudes of state and officials, and political stability in the hinterland.

The Dutch carried on the trade between Bengal and Sri Lanka, which they had annexed in 1658, competing with Bengal and Golconda merchants but using to advantage their territorial dominance. Thus, they took over into their hands the export of Sri Lankan cinnamon to Bengal. They also entered into the export of arecanuts and chanks from Sri Lanka and Madura, to Bengal. In return they brought rice and foodstuff for the consumption of the community in their forts and cities. In most of these commodities, with the exception of cinnamon, they had to compete with Indian

merchants whose trade in Sri Lanka was vital to the island's economy. To get a share of this trade they licensed Dutch freeburghers settled in Colombo and Galle to sail to Bengal with diverse Sri Lankan products and return with rice, butter, edible oils, etc. There was also an attempt to enter the trade in another attractive trade commodity—cowries. The Dutch procured cowries—from Maldivian traders who called at Colombo annually—which they shipped to Bengal. But here they had to compete with direct shipments from the Maldives to Bengal, which was in the hands of Bengal merchants.

It is clear from this description that Dutch operations in Bengal in the seventeenth century were of a large scale and contributed substantially to the economy of the subah. The increase in demand for Bengal products—raw silk, silk piece-goods, coarse and fine cotton muslins and piece-goods, opium, sugar, saltpetre, rice—certainly led to increased productivity and lubricated the engines of trade. The Dutch paid for these imports with bullion they brought from Europe and Japan, contributing to the money supply in the country and to the increasing circulation of this money. Generally, the Dutch had good relations with Mughal rulers of the subah, who were well aware of the prosperity generated by Dutch trade. While Dutch activity did not lead to any change in the production process of the major commodities of export, there were some innovations introduced by the Dutch to regularize and control this production. One of these was an early attempt to establish a refining unit for saltpetre at Patna in 1641, because of the constant shortfall in the supply of refined saltpatre. Another was the establishment of a unit to print chintz in Patna. A third was the establishment of a unit to reel raw silk at Kassimbazar in 1653. In terms of job creation, Om Prakash estimates that 33,000 to 44,000 full-time jobs were attributable to the Dutch procurement of textiles and raw silk in Bengal in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, out of a total of one million employed in the textile manufacturing sector.

The English became the major European rivals of the Dutch for the Bengal trade, but it took many decades for them to achieve this position. The English carried on a limited trade in Bengal and

Orissa from their factories in Balesore and Hariharpur, and in 1650 received a farman from the Viceroy, Prince Shuja, to establish a factory in Hughli on favourable terms. They were permitted to make a commuted annual payment of Rs 3000 for their entire trade in the province. In return they were exempt from customs and transit duties on their trade. They thus enjoyed a tax advantage over the Dutch, though they were also subject to several inland duties arbitrarily imposed by local territorial heads and rentiers. In the 1650s the trade was modest, the stock was small and exports from Bengal were primarily saltpetre, some raw silk and textiles for Europe, and sugar for Persia. After the incorporation of the Company as a permanent joint-stock, capital sent to Bengal was increased and the Directors decided to pursue Bengal trade vigorously. In the 1660s, average annual exports from Bengal rose to over Rs 200,000 and raw silk and textiles began to take a central place in the Company's export trade. From then on there was a progressive expansion in the value of the trade, the seventies saw average annual values of over Rs 600,000, the eighties over Rs 800,000 and in the last decade of the century annual values had increased to well over Rs 1,000,000. Saltpetre continued as a basic commodity of export—it had the advantage of ballast to European shipping. The annual demand for Europe in the last quarter of the century varied from 500 tonnes to 1,000 tonnes. In the 1670s, English demand for raw silk for the domestic market increased from 600 to 900 bales per year (86,000 to 128,000 pounds) to 11,000 bales (1.5 million pounds) in the early 1680s, when demand dropped again to the previous scale. The demand was, however, never met in full and the actual quantities exported in the 1680s were in the region of 150,000 to 200,000 pounds per year.

By way of textiles, the English exported piece-goods of silk, cotton and mixed cotton and silk from Bengal. Of these, cotton piece-goods formed by far the largest proportion. As in the case of raw silk, there is a sudden spurt in English exports of textiles from Bengal starting with the mid 1670s. The 1680s were the boom years of trade. An annual average of 200,000 pieces was exported during this decade. The Company invested over Rs 1,000,000 each year on textiles. As in the case of the Dutch, the demand always

exceeded supply. It appears that, during the last two decades of the seventeenth century, the Company gradually began a shift from Coromandel to Bengal in its purchases of textiles. While Bengal had always provided the fine cotton goods, it now appeared that the English were looking to Bengal for the coarse goods as well, which previously had been manufactured mainly in Coromandel. There was a slump in English trade in Bengal from 1688 to 1698, caused by two factors. The first of these was the Anglo–Mughal wars of 1687–8 and the consequent interdiction of English trade in India by the Mughals. The second was the instability caused by the reorganization of the old Company in England, following upon the 1688 Revolution and the political changes. Trade resumed in 1699, and the eighteenth century saw a great expansion of English trade in Bengal.

In discussing English trade in Bengal, reference should be made to English private trade carried on by Company servants located in Bengal and Madras, and by English freemerchants unattached to the Company. These merchants took full advantage of the exemption from customs and transit dues to English trade, and participated in the sea-borne trade down the Hughli and from Balesore as well as in the riverine trade inland. There was a brisk trade between Bengal and Coromandel conducted by Company servants in both these places. English officials in Madras and Masulipatnam traded in Bengal rice, silk, textiles and opium, and in Coromandel salt and textiles. The freemerchant community grew rapidly after the establishment and fortification of Calcutta in 1698. English private trade also flowed from Bengal to western India and the Persian Gulf. They traded in Bengal sugar, silk, textiles and opium to Surat and Gombroon, returning from there with West Asian goods, cotton, and Malabar pepper from Surat. This private trade was just beginning to expand in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. It was to boom in the eighteenth.

All the evidence above points to a close integration of Bengal with international trade in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. This period saw a growth in the pace of Asian trade and Bengal participated in this growth, together with other major trading regions of the Indian subcontinent. It was noted above that

commercial enterprise in Bengal was fuelled by a number of factors. An important factor was the active involvement of Mughal officials in sea-borne commerce. During Shaista Khan's long subahdarship, covering the latter part of the century, he participated in commercial activities, expanded Mughal power in the eastern delta and Burma border areas and combated piracy in these waters. Though he engaged in monopolistic practices and forced trade to his advantage, overall the effects of his policy were to foster commerce and encourage participation by other subordinate Mughal officials. The Bengal merchant groups were strengthened by this activity, operating on behalf of officials, receiving their patronage, and by the opportunity to be brokers and middlemen to European Companies. Bengal merchant shipping flourished in the last three or four decades, from the ports of Hughli and Balesore. Then there were merchants from other regions—Coromandel, Malabar and Gujarat —who traded to Bengal ports and became carriers of Bengal goods.

The eastward trade of Bengal continued as a strong component of the total trade till the last decade of the seventeenth century. The trade to Tenasserim and on to Siam, to the Malaya peninsula and to Acheh, were the main elements. After resisting the Dutch attempts to interfere with it in the 1650s, the trade had a continuity till the end of the century. Upto twenty ships would leave the ports of Balesore and Hughli in the 1670s and 1680s. The ships were owned by Mughal officials and Bengal merchants. They took with them Bengal foodgrains, opium and textiles, and brought back a variety of South East Asian goods as well as Chinese and Japanese goods sold in South East Asian ports. It was seen earlier that the procurement of elephants in Siam, Burma, Malaya and Sumatra was the main attraction of this trade. Om Prakash has shown, from a study of the shipping lists of Balesore and Hughli, a dramatic decline in this trade in the 1690s, and its virtual disappearance in the eighteenth century. It appears that a major reason for this decline was the withdrawal of Mughal officials from this trade, leaving Bengal merchants as sole participants in the trade. This is an interesting phenomena and has implications for the history of Indian commerce in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dutch expansion into South East Asia had made Indian trade to

that region less profitable. It is possible that Bengal goods, especially textiles, silk and opium, were now being fed into the archipelago markets largely by the Dutch. Further, the import of elephants declined in the 1690s. It is possible that the Mughal military machine had no need for elephants in this period, and this may partly explain the decline of interest of the official nobility in trade. Dutch use of force to control shipping could hardly have been a factor. Indian merchant interests had survived this threat and had developed strategies to circumvent it.

At almost the same time, Coromandel merchants were faced with similar threats to their South East Asian trade. As their lucrative archipelago markets were shut down by the Dutch, these merchants were constantly on the search for other markets and were establishing links with other ruling groups in coastal states. Thus, Coromandel merchants penetrated the Malay states of Johore, Kedah, Perak, as well as the kingdom of Ayuthya where Golconda merchants held positions of influence. In this way, Coromandel–South East Asia trade survived into the eighteenth century, if in a somewhat truncated form. Bengal merchants do not seem to have had such adaptability. Their dealings with South East Asian commercial states were not deep-rooted; they could not survive periods of interruption and change. Coromandel merchants may even have won over markets in which Bengal merchants traded, and may even have provided these markets with Bengal goods. Some of the trade could also have been taken over by English free merchants who were active in the west coast of Malaya as well as in the Burmese and Siamese ports.

Bengal trade with Coromandel expanded in the latter part of the seventeenth century and continued well into the eighteenth. The trade in foodgrains and other foodstuff was vital to the entire Coromandel coast, which became more dependent on rice imports from Bengal. The shipping of Masulipatnam and Madras was dominantly geared to this trade. It was primarily carried out by Coromandel merchants—Golconda Muslims, Chulia Muslims of the south, Tamil and Telugu Chetties. Portuguese, Armenians and English freemerchants based in Madras also came strongly into this trade. A trade that was retained in Bengal hands and continued

strongly in this period was the trade to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The trade to Sri Lanka, after a brief interruption in the 1660s when the Dutch sought to regulate it, resumed in strength. Annually, four to six large ships would sail to Sri Lankan ports carrying rice, other foodgrains, edible oils and some textiles, and return with elephants, arecanuts, chanks and pepper. The Sri Lankan consumer became dependent on Bengal rice which supplied over 50 per cent of the coastal population's needs. This trade was carried on by Mughal officials as well as by Bengal Hindu and Muslim merchants. To the Mughals, elephants were the prime attraction. But as in the case of the trade to South East Asia, participation of officials in shipping to Sri Lanka came to an end with the 1690s, though the merchants continued the trade into the eighteenth century.

The Bengal–Maldives trade was also thriving in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Annually, upto seven capital ships would make this voyage from Balesore and Hughli. Again the major items of export were rice and other foodstuffs, some textiles and silks and opium. The major articles of import form the Maldives was cowries, and there were other items such as coconuts and coir rope. During the height of this trade, in the 1670s and 1680s, a number of the ships were owned by Mughal officials, but in the 1690s their participation phased out. Yet the trade was continued by the Bengal merchants who carried it through, in reduced volume, into the eighteenth century. The trade of Bengal to Surat and West Asia was largely initiated by Surat merchants. This was an expanding trade in the second half of the seventeenth century, as Bengal produce was finding a widening market in Gujarat, Sind, Persia and the Red Sea. Bengal sugar, opium, textiles and silk were saleable in these markets. Surat merchants would import these goods in their ships from Bengal to be re-exported to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. They faced Dutch competition in this trade, and profits were declining towards the end of the century. Also appearing as competitors on this route were English Company servants and freemerchants based in Bombay and Madras, trading with the advantage of freedom from customs in Bengal.

There is a curious feature about Bengal trade and enterprise in this period. While Bengal itself occupied an increasingly important

position in Asian and world trade from the second half of the seventeenth century, this is not translated into a strong foundation for the emergence of a Bengali merchant class of overseas entrepreneurs. After years of being stifled by Arakanese and Portuguese piracy and violence on the seas, it seems to have taken long for Bengali shipping to reassert itself. When Bengal's overseas trade began to expand, administrators and officials of the Mughal state wanted to be in the action themselves and, though they often acted in collaboration with merchants, as in Gujarat, they appear to have had the whip hand and directed operations themselves. One wonders whether, given the relative weakness of Bengal overseas merchant interests, this stifled their growth to independence and self-confidence. In Gujarat, Mughal imperial officials as well as provincial officials were participating in trade. In Bengal, official participation sprung more from provincial administrators who thus had a freer hand in forcing trade. European evidence is abundant on the oppressive system, the monopolies and pre-emptive buying practices pursued by Mughal officials in their personal interests. Though this evidence has to be treated with scepticism, it is possible to argue that the balancing forces towards a more equitable trade that were there in Gujarat were absent in Bengal. The Gujarati Shahs who had migrated and settled as merchants in Bengal certainly emerged as powerful shipowners and overseas traders in the seventeenth century. But they were Hindus, and what Bengal probably lacked was a class of independent Muslim merchants domiciled in Bengal, with the ability to operate the Mughal political system as successfully as the Gujarati Muslims of Surat. When the Mughal officials withdrew from participating in overseas trade, the strength of the merchant fleet declined. Probably, less capital was injected into trade and, just at this time, Calcutta was founded, providing a base for the speedy growth of a fleet owned privately by Englishmen who could pick up the pieces of the trade.

7

Indian Merchants of the Coast

Merchants form a pivotal group in understanding maritime India and the commercial functions that were performed in the maritime zone. They are a difficult group to study and comprehend, in view of the mismatch between theory and practice, between what they appear to be and what they really are, between their perceived and real strengths or weaknesses. They have occupied the attention of historians of Indian society and culture over the long period of cultural evolution. Studies of merchants in the immediate pre-colonial period have progressed slowly, but, with the growth of interest in India's overseas trade in that period, these merchant groups of the various regions have begun to appear in sharper outline in the pages of history. As evidence of this commerce is uncovered in European—and more sparsely in indigenous—records, the activities of these agents of commerce have begun to possess a sharper focus. In the present state of our knowledge it is possible to make generalizations about merchant groups, their functions and their relationships to the wider society from which they emerged.

The historiography has progressed to a point where an interesting debate is being conducted, and some of the earlier notions on merchants and society are being revised. In the classical Hindu-Indian tradition, merchants occupied the third place in a four-class hierarchy, subordinate to Brahmans and rulers, performing hereditarily the occupations of merchandizing and moneylending. Likewise, Islamic orthodoxy with its injunctions against usury and excessive profiteering is held to relegate commercial activities to the fringes of its ideology. Thus it was held that the two dominant cultural traditions were ideologically antagonistic to mercantile roles, and thus could not admit of those who performed these to the inner layers of power in their respective polities. Arising out of this premise, it was sought to explain commerce as an activity that

existed and flourished separately from rulership, military power and administration. Colonial historians who sought to explain India's economic backwardness in terms of otherworldliness and life-negating ideologies thus portrayed states as essentially anti-commerce and anti-merchant. Merchants and commerce that survived in this milieu were held to be subject to constant harassment and oppressive taxation.

In the light of the gathering body of evidence on pre-colonial commerce, this negative view could not be sustained. It was replaced by a more sophisticated explanation of a compartmentalization between politics, rulership and armed power, and commerce and mercantile activity. In this view the Indian state had evolved a system to accommodate the predominance of political power in the hands of an elite with the pragmatic necessity to foster commerce. Thus the activity of commerce is carried on independently of rulership by a separate group of specialists drawn from traditional merchant groups. The rulers seldom interfered with commerce, just as the merchants did not concern themselves with administration. With this segmentation, commerce is said to have expanded. This is also held to explain the unconcern of rulers with the maritime parts of their territories, and even with the ports and their administration. This is also held to explain the absence in the development of naval power in an Indian state. Sovereignty and rulership is held to be confined to the territorial limits of a state. Merchants who traded on the seas operated in a separate neutral domain and were not the concern of the state. Thus, unlike the Chinese imperial state, Indian rulers did not seek, at any time, to impose regulations on the places to which merchants could sail, nor even curtail in any way the freedom to depart from and enter the state's territories.

In the very recent historical literature, further detailed evidence has come to light on the activities of merchants in the pre-colonial state. Our interpretation of the place of merchants in society has been taken a step further, with less emphasis on the compartmentalization of political and economic functions. The unmistakable evidence of sophisticated economic activity in a number of states has compelled analysts to attribute a more central role to merchants. Instead of being segregated and distinct, political and economic

functions are seen to overlap at many points and cut across each other. The political world did not operate independent of, and oblivious to, the economic, nor could the economic world exist and prosper without reference to the political. Thus, recent studies of pre-modern commerce in the subcontinent become investigations of political economy, giving as much emphasis to the political world in which that commerce was undertaken. The former assumptions of confrontation or separation between politics and commerce are replaced by a search for co-operation and interaction as well as what each sector brought into, and gained from, such interaction.

The merchant is held to be comfortable in his political world, not alien to it or unconcerned by it. Some recent studies have looked in great detail at the careers of merchants in manipulating and utilizing their political world. The *modus operandi* of merchants differed widely in the various parts of India, depending on the diverse political and administrative situations in which they operated. In almost all regions, they are found to have had access to political power, sometimes at the highest level, often at the intermediary regional level of the coast and the hinterland. In the Mughal empire merchants enjoyed influence at various levels of administration, from the emperor downwards. At the provincial level, more relevant to their activities, they peddled influence and played politics with the various organs of administration. Provincial governors had to work closely with major merchant figures of their areas. Merchants had access to the highest provincial officials to defuse an impending crisis or sort out a problem before it got out of hand. Merchants employed vakils and retainers in the courts of emperors and powerful princes, through whom representations were made to redress grievances or make complaints.

In the smaller states outside the Mughal empire, merchants enjoyed an even more favourable environment for influence-peddling and even exercising power. In the two substantial Islamic states of Golconda and Bijapur, the situation was rather like that in the Mughal empire. Merchants moved through various levels of administration from centre to periphery, looking after their interests. The shorter distances involved made this easier than in the Mughal empire. The courts at Golconda and Bijapur were subject

to the influence of merchants through their agents. In these states their influence could extend to the appointment of provincial and port officials which they frequently utilized to secure appointees favourable to their interests. These features were even more prevalent in the yet smaller kingdoms of the far south—the Nayakdoms of Ikkeri, Thanjavur, Gingee and Madura, the Malabar kingdoms and the Thevar of Ramnad. These smaller territorial entities were very susceptible to the influence of merchants who were vital to their prosperity and even their survival. In some of these kingdoms, merchants in the early seventeenth century are known to have actively participated in political squabbles and factionalism, and attempted to play the role of king-makers. Some of the Malabar kingdoms were a case apart. Being port-city states, solely dependent on trade, merchants and rulers operated a duumvirate of power.

The criss-crossing of functions between political and economic is also epitomized by an increasing tendency of rulers and administrators to operate at the commercial level. This is a remarkable characteristic of the seventeenth century and marks this period from the preceding and the succeeding centuries. One can only speculate on the reasons for this. The undoubted expansion of India's oceanic trade that went on from the mid-sixteenth century appears to have increased the wealth gained by the state from commerce. This gave visibility to merchants and attracted ruling groups in the state to attempt to secure for themselves a personal share in this wealth. Bottomry loans, similar to the Respondentia loans in Europe, were a widespread practice in maritime India. A wide range of investors, including officials and noblemen, would lend money to overseas merchants on high interest rates of 16 to 24 per cent for risks at sea. The participation of rulers and administrative officials in commerce, both by direct investment in their own names and through proxies and merchants already engaged in trade, gave the state a direct stake in commerce and brought commercial matters to the forefront of state policy in a way unknown previously.

Inasmuch as the ruling elites began to participate in commerce, it provided merchants with further access to them and to the organs of state power. Rulers required the expertise of merchants to manage their investment for them and to take day-to-day operational

decisions on this investment. In this way, merchants became instruments of state power, and the more the state depended on the returns of commerce the more was the rulers' dependence on merchants. As states like the Mughal empire went deeper into commercial enterprise, imperial officials came to rely more and more on merchants as the major agents of commercial exchange, both within the country and in overseas markets. When the imperial family entered shipbuilding and the freight traffic between Surat and Bandar Abbas or Mokha, it needed merchant clients to participate by shipping their goods in these ships. Though there is no evidence of the emergence of an institutional position of 'royal merchant' (*saudagar raya*), as there was in the Malay sultanates of South East Asia, there definitely were state favoured merchants who conducted their own business, together with that of royal investors. In the smaller states of Malabar and the far south, there were often individuals who operated in this manner and were recognized as the most powerful among the merchants of that state.

In the seventeenth century, merchants acquired further levers of political influence as economic activity expanded and as merchants were called upon to assist the state in other ways. Changes in the collection and defraying of tax revenues along the coast and inland increasingly brought merchants into this activity. The conversion of tax revenues collected in kind into cash required merchant collaboration and investment. The farming out of the revenues by auction to maximize their worth again brought the merchants in as revenue farmers and speculators. This was an activity of great value to merchants, not only in the economic rewards it brought but also through the political influence that came in its wake. A merchant tax farmer became tied to the beneficiary of the revenue, who was generally an influential military lord or administrator, through a bond of mutual self-interest. The merchant as tax farmer secured some administrative and judicial authority over parts of the land, which he could use to his commercial advantage. Thus, especially in the south, merchants farmed the taxes of coastal lands, ports and hinterland, agricultural and manufacturing districts. This gave them a position of precedence over their competitors in the markets of these areas and in the

acquisition of goods produced there. Tax farming spread widely throughout the subcontinent in the seventeenth century and expanded further in the eighteenth. Studies of the eighteenth century have shown that this activity further increased the power of merchants.

Another activity with a political dimension that enhanced the position of the merchants was the transfer of money and the growth of a money market in the seventeenth century. This was particularly current in the Mughal empire, with its vast territories in the Indo-Gangetic plains, Gujarat, Maharashtra and north Deccan. Revenue grantees needed to transfer large sums of money from outlying districts granted to them, to the cities where they lived. These transfers were managed by merchant financiers on whom the grantees depended to draw their incomes. This also brought the merchants in touch with powerful jagirdars and mansabdars of the realm, a nexus which merchants could utilize in times of need to secure political influence with the Mughal administration to smooth the path of trade and investment. This money transfer was not very widespread in the south, where the scale of operation was smaller, but even here the two larger kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda developed these facilities and provided opportunities for merchants.

By these various means, in the course of the seventeenth century merchants and the state were brought into closer interaction with each other. It was an interaction that could, on the face of it, be beneficial to both parties, as later examples will show. There is no doubt that it gave merchants a visibility and a profile sharper than they had before. It also gave the ruling elites of a state a new dimension of activity and an enhancement of their power, of which they did not fail to take advantage. By the same token, it exposed the merchants to political forces within the state. As examples below will show, merchant–state collaboration could also leave the merchant vulnerable. The state had ultimately the instruments of coercion in its hands. The merchant had no answer to the coercion of the state. There was no doubt as to who was dominant in this relationship. Happily, during most of the seventeenth century both

parties were able to work out this relationship to mutual benefit. The great growth of commerce in the subcontinent in this period is attributable to the evolution of a workable relationship.

Categories of merchants

Merchants in seventeenth-century India were a diverse group, divisible into many categories on the basis of ethnic and caste origins, nature of commercial operations, area of activity, and commodities traded in. Merchants were a highly cosmopolitan group, with constant movement in and out of the profession, and a high degree of spatial mobility. There were members of old traditional commercial castes that had engaged for generations in that profession. They were particularly strong in Gujarat, the Coromandel coast and Kanara. Then there were other social groups that moved from other occupations into commerce because of opportunities provided by their previous occupations. Thus, some weaver castes took to commerce along the Coromandel coast. Likewise, Paravas, a caste of pearl-divers and boatmen, took to small-scale commerce. Then there were expatriates who settled in ports as a group and continued trading activity. The most notable of these were Arabs whose settlement in India dates back to the eighth century. By the seventeenth century, Arabs were domiciled in India and there were very few expatriate Arab colonies. The major Islamic expatriate trading group in the seventeenth century were Persians and Turks. Finally, there were the Jews and Armenians who were settled in specific ports in small numbers.

The backbone of the sea-borne traders were shipowners and operators whose primary activity was long-distance and coastal trade. Their operations differed widely in scale. At one end were magnates who owned fleets of vessels based mainly in one large entrepôt port, such as Surat or Masulipatnam, or in a cluster of neighbouring ports, as in central and south Coromandel. The best examples of this in this period are Abdul Ghaffur of Surat, Mir Kamaluddin of Masulipatnam, and Astrappah Chetty of Paleacat/Devanampatnam. Abdul Ghaffur, arguably the largest sea-borne

merchant of India in the boom period, was held to own and sail upto twenty ships at the height of his career. The other two would have had between five and ten vessels. In descending order of operations, from these multiple shipowners there would be a number of shipowners, down to the single owner-operated ships doing regular overseas trips. It does not appear that joint ownership of ships was common among Indian merchants. Consequently shipowning became a specialized activity. But those who went into it did not do so to the exclusion of other forms of trade. The larger fleet-owning houses were generally controlled by the head of the family, who operated from a major port. He would have several members of the extended family working with him, and possibly sailing in his ships. But he relied mainly on an army of subordinates, working for him in different ports for commissions, or as paid servants. They would have regular agents in major producing centres and market towns to supply his ships with export goods on time and with market information. These merchants also had a network of agents or paid servants in the major overseas ports at which their ships called. Thus, it would be usual for Indian shippers to have agents and an office in ports such as Bandar Abbas, Basra, Mokha, Syriam, Mergui, Melaka, Acheh and Bantam. In the case of a single owner-operated vessel, the owning merchant would be expected to sail in it himself, making decisions as he went along in each port where the ship called.

A second category of overseas merchants, considerably larger than the first, were those who did not own ships but hired space in ships of others to transport goods which were to be sold in overseas markets. The bulk of India's overseas merchants of the seventeenth century belonged to this category. It was this pressure of demand from them for shipping space that was behind the construction of vessels of large capacity, upto 1000 tonnes, in this period. Freighting was good business because of this constant demand. The evidence is that ships sailing out of Indian ports, carried goods in small lots belonging to upto 500 merchants, who often sailed in the ships themselves. If they did not do so, the goods were consigned to agents or members of the family who were located in the ports of destination. This type of trading fits into the

description of peddling-trade that is to be found in the literature of pre-modern trade.

A third category of overseas merchants were kings, princes, other members of the royal family, administrative and military officials and nobles who took to trading in the course of the seventeenth century. There was a proliferation of these in the seventeenth century. The evidence points to a large list of them engaged in trade. These were members of the Mughal imperial family, subahdars and dewans of provinces, faujdars and shahbandars of ports, district military commanders. Besides Mughals, there were such officials from the states of Golconda and Bijapur, and the Hindu kingdoms of the south: Ikkeri, Thanjavur, Madura and Ramnad. The Malabar states belong to a separate category of trading states, where rulers have traditionally been engaged in trade. These were the states of Calicut, Cochin, Cannanore, Kayamkulam and Travancore, and the special case of Ali Rajah, the Mapilla merchant-prince with his own little domain near the port of Cannanore. Details of the mechanics of trade carried out by these princely and noble merchants are not available. It is known that they invested heavily in shipbuilding. The activity of the Mughal emperors in the first half of the seventeenth century is well known. There are also the endeavours of sultans of Golconda and Bijapur. The rulers of Malabar ran several coastal and ocean-going vessels. In some of these cases, e.g. the Mughals, the ships were used for a thriving freight traffic. In others it seems most probable that prominent merchants of the area were brought in to help in the commercial operations. Included in this category of royal merchants must be those of Ayuthya, Arakan, Acheh, Johore and Bantam, who regularly traded with Indian ports in their ships. It is known that they were certainly helped by Indian merchants in Indian ports, to whom goods in these vessels were consigned. In turn they helped procure a cargo for the ships on their return.

Finally, in this category of overseas merchants may be noted the emergence of specialist nachodas who played an increasing role in overseas commerce. In the earlier periods, the nachoda appears to have been a specialist sailor, a sea-captain and navigator who did not concern himself with trade. Later, there is evidence of the

participation of nachodas in commercial exchanges in the ports to which their ships sailed. It is possible that owners of goods who could not sail in the ships and had no agent in the port of destination entrusted the task of handling these goods to the nachoda for a commission or percentage of the profits. In this case the nachoda would be both a specialist sailor as well as a person with commercial expertise. People with this combined expertise were available in large numbers in the major trading areas of maritime India, especially Gujarat and Coromandel.

Apart from these types of merchants trading overseas, there was an even more diverse group of merchants operating in the ports and hinterland of maritime India. While no hard categorizations of this amorphous body are possible, groups with certain distinct features may be separated. Doing business with the incoming and outgoing ships were wholesalers who operated on a large scale in commodities of import and export. They specialized in specific commodities or dealt in a mix of them but usually in volume. They purchased in bulk from ships, sometimes contracting for an entire shipload, and had warehouses in the port for storage and resale in small lots. These merchants had agents in all hinterland markets to dispose of imports. The only evidence of their operations relating to import commodities is in their dealings with Europeans. They were bulk buyers of spices, copper, tin, broadcloth, lead, zinc and other minerals imported by Europeans.

The activities of these commodity merchants in respect of the export trade are better documented. They were vital to the smooth running of the export trade in textiles, pepper, indigo, saltpetre and opium—commodities which had to be procured in the hinterland and delivered at ports in time for shipping schedules. They were in contract to the major exporters—Indians and Europeans—and usually worked on the basis of advances because of the large sums involved. They also made spot purchases in common export goods like textiles and silk. Some of these commodity merchants were themselves exporters, even ship-owners. They purchased in weaving villages, in small lots to be sold to exporters or to be exported by themselves. When combining dealings in export and import commodities, they dominated trade in the large ports. They were able

to achieve market dominance of particular commodities and control prices through this dominance. The expansion of European trade gave a great fillip to their activities and brought into being an array of powerful commodity merchants throughout the four maritime regions, on whom European investment came to rely very heavily in this period. This will become clear when the merchant groups of each of these regions are discussed below.

Separate from this category were those who functioned as middlemen and brokers, servicing overseas trade. Their function was much the same as that of the previous group but they lacked the resources and therefore the independence of that group. They worked largely on advances from the large merchants who used them to accumulate goods in small lots for export. They also serviced the import trade by finding buyers, again in small lots. They were itinerant, travelling some distance into the hinterland to producing villages and market towns. Their major area of operation was the textile trade, and they had close links with weaving villages where they doled out advances to many weavers. They generally took the risks of bad debts with weavers, and they attended to the quality of the goods delivered. In spite of this expertise and useful function, their returns were generally not more than about 5 per cent. Their number increased enormously in the seventeenth century, particularly in and around European port settlements. The large European textile investment was taken up in the first instance by the main contractor merchants, who then sublet them to these numerous brokers, who in turn spread out into villages deep in the hinterland. Not infrequently, merchants starting as brokers would accumulate enough capital to move on as independent merchants trading on their own.

Another major category of merchants were financiers, shroffs, dealers in exchange and the minting of specie. It is natural that, in a context of expanding commerce, more opportunities should have come into being for this trade. In areas of high activity such as Gujarat, entire lineages began to specialize in this activity. They came from the Hindu and Jain Banya sub-castes and formed great financial houses with established reputations throughout India. The financial activities engaged in by them were varied. There was the

raising of capital by loans to merchants for their inland or overseas ventures. In all the main ports of India such facilities were readily available. Then there was the facility to transfer money across distances, both along the coast and inland. This seems to have been better developed in Gujarat and Bengal, with their deep hinterlands, than in other parts. It was from the major financial houses in Gujarat that branches spread to Coromandel and Malabar to set up exchange and money-transfer businesses. In both the raising of loans and the transfer of money, state officials participated and used the services of merchants. Further, there was the assaying, valuing and exchange of specie from various parts of the trading world. Gold, silver and copper coins from West Asia, South East Asia and Europe were brought in payment for goods and were exchanged by these merchants for current coin. Then there were the various regional coins of the subcontinent to be exchanged. Finally, there was the business of buying and selling bullion which was particularly prevalent as European investment picked up.

These categories were by no means mutually exclusive, and one person could combine in himself many of the activities grouped here. There was a great deal of flexibility in trading operations and merchants moved from one to the other as opportunities presented themselves. Exporters and seaborne merchants could, for example, turn suppliers of other merchants if that was found more profitable, just as land-based commodity merchants could become exporters and shipowners. Shipowners could abandon this and become freighters. Exchange and money merchants could have a stake in a ship venturing on a voyage. A noble or princely merchant could sell off to one of the professional merchants and move out of commerce. It was this volatility that made seventeenth century Indian commerce a complex web of constantly changing patterns as well as appearing and disappearing personalities.

Philip Curtin has developed the concept of merchant diaspora to explain the functioning of cross-cultural trade across the centuries. This concept has some limited applicability to the trade of the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century. There was no major migration of merchants or the creation of merchant settlements overseas in this era of expanding trade. In fact, Gujarati settlement

in South East Asia dwindled, but in keeping with the new direction of Gujarati trade there was some settlement of her merchants in the ports of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Gujarati Banya settlements continued in the Persian empire, in some south Arabian ports, and in East Africa. Among other noteworthy Indian settlements overseas were the Golconda Muslim colonies in southern Burma and southern Siam, and the Persian settlements (largely originating from Golconda) in Ayuthya. These derived some political significance, and leaders of these colonies secured high administrative positions in the kingdom of Ayuthya. Perhaps the most numerous of the overseas settlements were those of Chulia Muslims in southern Siam, Kedah, Perak, Johore and Acheh. These came nearest to the establishment of a continuous migration and settlement, with in-groups from south Indian ports planting colonies in the port-states of South East Asia and retaining contacts with their places of origin. Coromandel Hindus who had, previous to the seventeenth century, shown a tendency to found settlements in the Malay peninsula, appear to have withdrawn from them in our period. The Persians appear as itinerant merchants now, with a tendency to settle when the political and religio-cultural conditions were right, as in Golconda. It may be argued that there was no need for a diaspora of merchants to handle trade in the seventeenth century as the trading world of the Indian Ocean had acquired certain basic unitary principles of operation, including common and intelligible languages.

A fascinating phenomenon in the movement of merchants in this period is the migration and settlement of Armenians in several Indian ports. The big explosion of Armenian migration from their homelands had brought them first to Persia, and from there to various points on major Indian Ocean trade routes. Surat, Masulipatnam and Hughli were major Indian ports where they settled and traded, and then moved to the English settlements of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. They were shipowners and overseas merchants, but they also penetrated land-based trade in the supply of export goods and the redistribution of import commodities in the Indian hinterland. They also entered the financial markets and the transfer of money across land and sea. Because of their position,

they were able to occupy a medial role between Europeans and Asians, confided in by both, and proficient in the trading mechanisms of both. Among other cross-cultural groups of interest to trade were the Jews of Cochin and the Syrian Christians of Malabar, who, after European settlement on that coast, performed special intermediary roles for the European powers.

It appears that a key to the growth of commerce and to merchant entrepreneurship in the seventeenth century was an integrated credit system with several sources of credit available to a potential borrower. The regular source was the shroffs, who were recipients of capital from several sources. High administrative officials would lend to, or deposit money on interest with, shroffs; they in turn loaned it to merchants. A variety of private individuals would also deposit money with shroffs. Thus, capital from land became commercial capital in the hands of merchants. Merchants themselves would lend money to each other. In this way money flowed in several directions, from agricultural areas to market towns to ports and vice versa, and even from overseas when merchants and rulers of foreign states sent parcels of money to be invested in India. The efficient system of exchange speeded up these capital transfers and smoothed the way to commercial transactions.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, commercial practices throughout the subcontinent had been developed to ensure the stable conduct of commerce. These practices came from traditional Hindu and migrant Islamic sources, and one does not seem to have intruded into the other to upset relationships. Hindu merchants accepted the unequal incidence of taxation and, subject to this, there were few problems to their operations in an Islamic state. Every merchant was first a member of a community or caste group, and only then the subject of a state. His operations were bound by customary law, which the state generally accepted and enforced. The communal group, of which the merchant was a member, was generally self-regulating. Many of the disputes were settled by arbitration within the group, which the state accepted. Contracts were both written and verbal, being justiciable in Hindu or Islamic courts. Despite the fact that little Indian documentation

has survived, as contrasted with the mass of European commercial papers, most transactions were in writing.

Europeans and Indian merchants interacted in several interesting ways in the seventeenth century. The two groups began with mutual suspicion of each other's intentions during the early decades. The first attempts of the English and the Dutch to settle trade in Indian ports met with resistance from Indian merchants. They were particularly concerned at the greater competition they would have to face in export markets. They were also apprehensive that the entry of Europeans into the producing markets would lead to scarcity and result in price rises. In Gujarat, merchants put up a stiff resistance to the admission of Dutch and English trade through their influence with the faujdar of the port and with neighbouring officials. Likewise, in Masulipatnam, local merchants were at the outset hostile to the establishment of European trade. Part of this hostility was tied to merchant perceptions of how they should deal with inter-European rivalry and conflict. Indian merchants, having come to terms with the Portuguese, were reluctant to upset them by dealing with the newcomers.

Indian merchants learnt fast that these newcomers had much greater potential, both in coercion and in open competitive trading. When neither their own rulers nor their former protectors, the Portuguese, could offer them protection against the Dutch and the English, they quickly changed their attitudes and learnt to accommodate to the new situation. When these attitudes changed and merchants in every trading region began to deal with the Dutch and the English, they began to reap rewards. Soon they realized the strengths and the weaknesses of the trade of the Companies and adopted strategies to deal with them. This led to a new stage in relationships between Indian merchants and Europeans that lasted for three quarters of a century. In this stage, merchants became active helpers in the settlement and growth of European trade, often acting as intermediaries to Europeans in their dealings with Indian rulers.

They helped in the initial creation of an infrastructure for the European settlement or factory, in providing for them the basic necessities and in recruiting labour and service personnel. Above

all, the merchants entered vigorously into the export and import trade of Europeans, as supply merchants, as brokers for export commodities, and as wholesale buyers of European imports. In both the export and import trade the opportunity to engage in transactions of great volume with regularity attracted influential merchants in every area to European custom. Thus, permanent relationships were established between important Indian merchants and the Europeans. Some examples of these relationships were those between Virji Vohra and the English in Surat, Astrapa Chetty and the Dutch in Paleacat, Khem Chand and the English in Hughli, to name just a few of a proliferating number of such connections. Just as complementarity and mutual benefit were a facet of the relationship, competition, rivalry and mutual distrust formed the opposite side of it. In the first half of the century the two companies entered Asian markets in competition with Indian exporters. There was acute competition in the textile, pepper, indigo and sugar trade in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea ports, and in Ayuthya, southern Burma, Acheh and western Malaya. This competition sharpened the trading strategies of Indian merchants who survived and, in many places, pushed the Companies out of the market in the latter half of the century. In the course of this activity, Indian merchants took advantage of capital resources, shipping capacity and navigational expertise in the hands of the Europeans, and further entrenched themselves. Many Indian shippers employed European pilots and gunners, with or without the official consent of the Companies, and strengthened their shipping capability considerably. Wherever it was in their advantage to do so, they entered into partnership with Europeans, officially and unofficially. In sum, the increased European activity in the Indian Ocean served to strengthen Indian merchant groups, and made them more efficient and innovative through competition.

In the seventeenth century, Indian merchants were living and operating in two domains—in the larger Indian states to which the ports and their hinterland belonged, and in the small European enclaves which were growing in the last decades of the century. In the former the merchants had learnt to live and adjust for centuries, as has been discussed above. Living in an alien jurisdiction was a

new experience, and there was at the outset no great desire to move to these enclaves. When the move did begin towards the last two or three decades, it was caused more by push from the hinterland than the pull of the European settlement. In the settlement, though the Company governed, it did not interfere with the Indian merchant communities but permitted and encouraged autonomous management of their affairs. So there is seen to be little difference between the functioning of Indian merchants in an Indian state and in a European settlement during this period. There was perhaps a greater degree of social mobility in the settlement than was possible in the Indian state.

Did mercantile practices and techniques change under the influence of European activity? There is little evidence of major innovations or change. Contractual obligations became an important facet of commercial exchange. Supply merchants had to sign standard contracts with the Dutch and English Companies in all trading regions, but these were frequently not complied with to the letter. Often, merchants were able to plead extenuating circumstances for shortfall in delivery or delay of time. Later in the century, the Companies attempted to introduce penalty clauses for non-performance within the contracts but these were fiercely and successfully resisted by the merchants. They became a feature only in the eighteenth century, when the merchants were unable to oppose their inclusion. An apparent innovation in the European enclaves was the formation of a group of associated merchants into a joint-stock and an attempt by the Company government to give this body a corporate identity. It is difficult to assert that this was a total innovation, as the concept of merchants coming together to contribute to a common fund in shares and to use that stock for trade had been prevalent in India. What the Companies were doing was to institutionalize this practice and give it corporate personality, so as to make it liable for non-performance of contract. They were also trying to introduce some supervision over the accounting of this body and its management. All such attempts were stoutly resisted by members of the joint-stock, which thus did not take off as a strong trading body among Indian merchants. The Europeans were also trying to introduce the principle of collective and several

responsibility in a joint-stock. Thus, it does not appear as if European influence basically affected commercial practice in India in this period.

On the other hand, Europeans had to accept entrenched Indian commercial methods in their dealings. One such was the demand for security from merchants while entering into major contracts. Merchants in a number of Indian regions flatly refused to provide security on the ground that to give security was an affront to their honour and their standing in the community. Another was the practice of present payment for a later delivery, a practice sanctioned in Islamic commercial law. Yet another was the practice of return of goods bought within a stipulated number of days. All these offended against European practices of purchase and sale, creating difficulties for the Companies in their export and import trade. In these basic commercial practices Europeans had to follow custom and tradition.

An example of this was in the wholesale purchase of goods imported by Europeans into India. When these goods were sold by the European importers, a rebate had to be allowed to the purchaser. In Surat this rebate consisted of a reduction of 3 per cent on the value of the goods, calculated at four months' interest on the entire purchase at ¾ per cent per month. The practice was widespread among Indian merchants and the Companies were compelled, however reluctantly, to follow it if they were to dispose of their imports. Among Indians, rebates appear to have been higher, about 5 to 7 months' interest being deducted. If the rebate was not allowed, the buyer regulated his offer accordingly, and so the Companies saw no purpose in resisting the practice. It would have had its origins in the slow process by which wholesalers were able to dispose of their goods to interior markets. The buyers paid cash when the transaction was complete and collected the rebate when they took the goods out of the Company's godowns.

It is noteworthy that, during a century of interaction between merchants and the weaving industry, they did not secure control over that industry or succeed in subordinating the labour of weavers. There are a few examples of some merchants being able to secure a total monopoly control over the labour of weaving villages in close

proximity to ports. But there is no case of merchants being able to employ weavers as paid labour. The relationship between merchant and weaver was one of commodity exchange in which the weaver, however impoverished, retained his independence. Perhaps he was helped in this by the fact that for most of the seventeenth century demand outstripped supply. Merchants were competing fiercely for scarce goods, particularly those for the export markets. When Europeans entered the market, this was further compounded. The weaving village was an autonomous caste-centred entity into which merchants could only penetrate through intermediaries, who were often caste heads of weavers or local merchants who had won the confidence of the weavers. When the merchant's capital was deployed in the village, he had little guarantees to prosecute. The merchant had no means of coercing the weavers, except through the *sarkar*'s officials. Those merchants who controlled tax farms had some policing powers in the village but these had to be exercised with caution.

Indian merchants did not seek to control the tools used by the weavers or the raw materials of the industry. Indeed, they showed little interest in the technology and productive process of the industry, an attitude that contrasts with the English and Dutch who, towards the end of the century and into the eighteenth, began to interfere in the production process. Merchants advanced weavers money, and weavers bought thread, dyes and other raw materials for the industry. The merchant thus could not acquire specialized knowledge of the industry and was forced to rely on the caste leadership of weavers. The merchant seldom built up his own stockpile of goods. The export market was volatile at the best of times. With European exports, which were of a specialized character directed only to European markets, production was always to order. The merchants always had considerable sums loaned out to weavers. This continuous credit was all right when conditions were normal, prices steady and trade uninterrupted. But when there were crises of climatic and civil instability, default of debtors was widespread and merchants could be bankrupted in consequence. In all the regions, the 1690s recorded much indebtedness by weavers and default in delivery by merchants.

In some of the earlier historical literature there has been an exaggerated emphasis on taxation as a disincentive to merchant investment. In fact commerce was much less taxed than agricultural income, which was looked upon by rulers as the main source of wealth. Export and import duties in most ports were seldom more than 5 per cent, often around 3 per cent. With other incidental taxes in port, the total never came to more than 10 per cent on the value of goods traded. Merchants complained of transit or *radhari* duties imposed by grantees along major roads, though the state regulated duties along trunk roads. But the evidence is that even these were not excessive. Merchants valued the cover afforded by the Companies which had secured exemption from transit dues for a commuted payment. The extent of security afforded to merchant property has been the subject of controversy among historians. It has been held that property was subject to arbitrary seizure in many Islamic states and that regular inheritance was not permitted, property being subject to escheat. But the evidence shows that this was not widespread, that regular succession governed by Hindu or Islamic laws was permitted. Families have gone on trading and accumulating property for generations without state intervention. The only periods of insecurity were during invasions and conquest of one state by another. During this transition merchants have been known to have been subject to extortionate practices. It should be noted that most of the evidence of extortionate practices is from European sources, and these generally record hearsay accounts as well as contemporary gossip.

In the seventeenth century Indian merchants were a remarkably mobile group, especially within their region. They were reluctant to establish permanent places of residence and did not centralize their operations in any particular place. When we look at Surat, the most metropolitan trading place in India in this period, even the major merchants did not conduct all their operations from there. This is even more true in other ports of the Indian coast. It may have been the customary merchant caution in not being too visible at one place. Surat's merchants suffered from Maratha attacks of that city in 1664 and 1672. Prominent merchants, even though they were shipowners, kept their residences in inland towns and

villages. They did not become a coastal people and therefore did not construct large edifices in the major ports, but continued to give their patronage and support to inland religious centres near their natal villages. The only merchant communities that became urbanized in this period were the expatriate Muslims and Chulia Muslims, whose urbanization continued from a preceding period. This had important implications for the development of ports, which will be discussed later.

With this discussion of the general characteristics of merchants of the subcontinent in the seventeenth century, we may now turn to look at each of the four trading regions, noting merchant communities in these regions as they operated within their own local worlds. The four regions had four distinct power structures in this period, the major features of which have been noted above. Gujarat had been fully integrated into the Mughal empire, with effective imperial control and an administration subordinate to the centre. Bengal had been annexed to the empire relatively recently, and Mughal political power was still extending to the easternmost limits of the subcontinent. Mughal administrative control was effective only in the second half of the century. In Malabar and Kanara the political system was totally different. A moderate-sized land-based kingdom—Ikkeri—as well as several coastal kingdoms controlled the coastline, while to the north Bijapur was subject to strains of attack by Mughals and Marathas. On the Coromandel coast Golconda had effectively controlled a large part of the coast till it succumbed to the Mughals in the last decades of the century. To the south, Bijapur was in control till it fell to the Mughals, and the southernmost coast was ruled by small Hindu kingdoms. Thus, there was an overall stability, with elements of instability appearing in the second half of the century. Merchants had to operate in this world of impermanence and volatility.

Gujarat

Among Indian trading regions, the most powerful concentration of merchants was in Gujarat, noted for the large number of persons and family lineages with access to massive resources and possessed

of incomparable commercial expertise. They were as plural a collection as one would get anywhere. Muslims of various ethnic groups and sects were united by long domicile in Gujarat, and by the acquisition of a common Gujarati language and culture. They were Persians, Turks, Arabs, Khorasans, Pathans by ethnic origin, Sunnis, Shiahs, Borahs, and Ismailis by sect. The community was littered with brilliant personalities who come to view in the course of the century. There was Abdul Ghaffur, arguably the wealthiest merchant in the Indian Ocean world, his chief rival Chellaby, the head of the Turkish clan. A typical Mughal official merchant was Haji Zahid Beq who was, for many years, Shahbandar of the port of Surat. Naturally, being of Islamic faith, they started off at an advantage. They enjoyed lower customs for their goods than non-Muslims. The Banyas, a term which embraces Hindu and Jain merchant caste communities, were not far behind in their mercantile occupations. There were in all about eighty-four Jain and Hindu Vaisya clans (*kulas*) in Gujarat, and they saturated the commercial world. They were active in commerce of every description, though they were also major shipowners and sea-borne merchants. This was the one avenue where Muslims had the edge on them, for the trend in the seventeenth century was for Gujarati Banyas to get out of sea-borne commerce into land-based operations. Yet there were several major shipowners among them in this period. Virji Vorah was a leading Banya who dominated the pepper trade with Malabar and traded with South East Asia. It was as commodity merchants, brokers, financiers, exchange merchants and mint-masters that the Banyas excelled. They dominated the commodity trade and the exchange markets in Surat and Gujarat and were vital to the functioning of trade in that port. The Banyas were grouped into mahajans and spoke with a collective voice to the state, which paid heed to their representations. Parsis were becoming more important in the trade of Surat in the second half of the seventeenth century, as shipowners and shipbuilders. As the English trade in Surat grew, they tended to align themselves with the trade of the Company. The Armenians were also a growing presence in Surat, a natural extension from their Persian strongholds. Khwajah Minaz was a

leading Armenian merchant of Surat; his contacts with state officials and European Companies were good.

The financial markets of Gujarat were totally dominated by the Banyas, among whom there emerged several leading houses with all-India networks, particularly across the Gangetic plains into Bengal. Their services were utilized by merchants, by European Companies, and by Mughal officials. These officials lent to them and borrowed from them, and used their exchange channels to dispatch money to the capital cities or to their army camps. The money-transfer channel was used by merchants and Companies to send large sums into the producing districts for textiles, indigo and rice. It enabled Surat to tap deep into a hinterland for the acquisition of its export goods. The other sector dominated by the Banyas was the brokerage and wholesaling of commodities. Banyas dominated the market in the major import commodities, such as spices, pepper and copper, to the extent of being able to dictate prices. Brokers proliferated among Banyas in the second half of the seventeenth century. There were a few major brokers who came from the leading families—the Parekhs, the Vaishyas, the Thakurs—and who moved in to dominate the business of the Companies. Beneath them were hundreds of minor brokers who would have been utilized by the larger ones, and who would also have acted for myriads of overseas merchants of Surat.

Though there was a greater degree of centralization of trade and therefore of merchants in Surat than in the other regions of India, merchants were also domiciled in ports in close proximity to Surat, such as Cambay, Broach, Rander, Gandvi and Diu. The large presence of merchants in and around Surat gave them great influence in the administration of the port. This influence is seen to be augmented when we realize the degree of overlap between administrators and merchants, and the extent of imperial participation in trade flowing through Surat. The subahdars of Gujarat and Sind, the mutsuddi, kotwal and shahbandar of the port, Prince Khurram, the begums of the palace, and Emperor Shah Jehan himself, are known to have traded through Surat. It is not surprising therefore that the merchants should have had a voice in port administration.

They had direct and constant contact with local and provincial officials, as also with the imperial court where prominent merchants kept their vakils to present gifts and petitions to imperial officials.

The operation of this is seen in times of crisis when merchants suffered from hostile actions by other parties. When the Portuguese interrupted shipping flowing out of Surat, retribution was swift. During the dispute with the English in 1618–19, when Sir Thomas Roe hit upon the idea of seizing Surat vessels as hostages in his negotiations with the emperor, merchants were quick to make representations to the emperor to solve the dispute. These merchants had earlier persuaded the Emperor not to permit the English to sail direct out of Surat to Mokha. A similar exercise of merchant influence was seen in the crisis of 1648–49, when the Dutch attempted to stop Surat ships sailing to Acheh and extract from them a heavy duty in Melaka. Merchants took up the matter in the imperial court and brought the full might of imperial authority against the Dutch, persuading them to relax this policy. Towards the end of the century there was the crisis to Surat shipping, caused by piracy at the entrance to the Red Sea and near the Gujarat coast in the 1680s and 1690s. Again, merchant agitation both at provincial level and at the imperial court resulted in decisive action by the Mughals to coerce the English and the Dutch to protect Surat shipping in the Arabian Sea. An agreement was entered into for the English and Dutch to convoy Surat vessels to Mokha. An agreement by the Surat shippers to obey the orders of the Dutch convoy vessel was signed by three Banya brokers, Kitsendas, Bagawandas and Trikumdas, and countersigned by the Mutsuddi of Surat. The settlement with the English after the Anglo–Mughal Wars of 1687–90 gave heed to merchant claims of losses suffered during the wars. The English envoy sent by the Governor of Bombay, Josiah Child, to the Mughal court was accompanied by a Surat merchant, Meah Mizany.

The specialization in commodity purchases and the establishment of a network radiating from Surat into the major market towns of Sind, Multan, Upper Ganges, Rajasthan and the upper Deccan facilitated the disposal in bulk of a variety of commodities of import. The Banyas were the dominant commodity brokers and

dealers. They had the ability to purchase entire shiploads of imports; they often formed cartels to purchase goods imported by the Companies. For many decades a group of a handful of Banyas was able to dominate the market in spices and copper. In this way they were able to keep the price of spices in the interior high, and the Dutch attempted to break their hold by various means. They did this in spite of the method of public auction being practised in the sale of goods. The Dutch attempted to reform the system of selling so as to bring in some effective competition, but this had no effect. A few families continued to hold a vast share of the import trade of the port.

Banyas were also dominant in the trade in export commodities, particularly textiles, cotton, indigo and rice. the method was the standard one adopted all over India, of making advances to producers for delivery in time for departing ships to West Asia or to Europe. A few merchants dominated the supply of these goods to Surat. They had access to substantial credit and were able to send out their own money, through their agents, to the centres of production. When the European Compànies made large orders in textiles and indigo, they were able to supply these orders, using advances of upto 50 per cent from the Companies and supplementing it with their own capital. Unlike in Coromandel, Gujarat suppliers acted largely individually and handled large transactions as individuals. Later in the century, Parsis were beginning to come into the business as supply merchants, especially to the English. Banya merchant families specialized in business with the Europeans from generation to generation, and there developed a special relationship between them that went on into the eighteenth century.

In the seventeenth century, Gujarati merchants tended to cut down the very long-distance trading to South East Asia and concentrate more on the trade to West Asia as well as to the coastal trade of India upto Bengal. Banyas generally tended to reduce their seafaring ventures in favour of trade in the port and inland. This is reflected in the reduction and final abandonment of small Gujarati settlements in South East Asian ports. Towards the beginning of the century, we still hear of them in Acheh and further east in Bantam, Japara and Grisek. We hear of Gujaratis occupying port

administrative positions in these areas. In Acheh there were Islamic theologians and litteratures of Gujarati origin. By the end of the century these had virtually disappeared. This was partly caused by Dutch expansion in Java and into the archipelago islands. It was also the result of the shift of attention of Gujarati merchants westwards and landwards, which was in turn the result of the development of Mughal power and the economic directions of the empire.

In the last two decades of the century, Gujarati merchants were adversely affected by a chain of events in land and sea. Piracy was on the increase in the western Indian Ocean. Pirates drawn from nations and interest groups that were not benefiting from lawful trade between Europe and Asia now spread from their West Indian strongholds into the Indian Ocean. Commercial shipping at the entrance to the Red Sea and all along the west coast of India was easy picking for them, both because of the frequency of sailing and their expensive cargoes. Gujarati merchants were deeply affected by this when several capital ships were seized by these pirtates. On top of this was the Anglo–Mughal war (1687–90) when the English took as prize several valuable Surat ships. Though the ships were returned and the merchants were compensated at the end of the war, the interruption of trade for almost three years caused losses to these merchants. In some ways more lethal to the merchants and more long-lasting in its effects was the Mughal–Maratha war, which was now fought out in the hinterland of Surat, all along its major trade routes. Merchants had to pay off armies as well as pay for the recruitment of armed convoys. The cumulative effect of this was to disturb the placid commerce of Surat and Gujarat. Yet, despite all this, at the end of the seventeenth century Gujarati merchants formed a powerful group of entrepreneurs with a diversity and magnitude of commercial transactions without parallel elsewhere in India.

Bijapur, Kanara and Malabar

Bijapur was not a major trading kingdom with a large concentration of merchants. Its chief port of Dhabhol faded out during the

century, losing its trade to Surat and Goa. The chief long-distance merchants had been Arabs settled in these ports and the domiciled Navayat Muslims of Bijapur. When the Dutch established a factory in the port of Wingurla, they dealt with a number of Hindu merchant suppliers of the neighbourhood. Hindu merchants, Konkanis and Saraswats, were located southwards in the Kanarese ports and Goa. They traded in the Bijapur ports of Wingurla and Raybag, being the major suppliers there of pepper and rice which they brought from Kanara. A prominent merchant of the 1670s with extensive dealings with the Nayak was Polpot Nayak. From the little evidence available, it appears that merchants were deeply involved with Bijapur land officials and governors. In one instance, some copper bought from the Dutch and transported by Polpot Nayak upcountry was seized by the local governor in settlement of some debt claimed by him from the merchant. These officials attempted to buy import goods from the Dutch, especially the lucrative copper, directly or through the intermediacy of merchants. Bijapur officials of the coastal territories appear to have been heavily into trading, for which they utilized their coercive powers.

When the Ikkeri kingdom established its hegemony on the coast, it began to support merchant settlement in its ports. It first asserted its administrative control over ports which had previously enjoyed a degree of autonomy. In Basrur, Kannada Chetties had administered the port and collected customs. With the expansion of the kingdom, the Nayak appointed Thanathar to govern the port on his behalf. The Ikkeri ports of Basrur, Bhatkal, Honavar and Mangalore attracted large numbers of merchants under the rule of Venkatapa Nayak and his successors. These merchants were Hindus—Kannada and Komatti Chetties, Konkani and Saraswat Brahmans. Also, Mapilla Muslims came there from Malabar to trade more freely, away from Portuguese pressure. Konkani merchants were mainly involved in coastal trade northwards and southwards upto Surat and to Sri Lanka—with pepper, rice and coconut produce. Saraswat Brahmans found a favourable haven in Goa, where the Portuguese enticed them with privileges to ensure the port's rice supply. These merchants traded under Portuguese protection along the coast to Diu and Cochin. Their coastal ship-

ping was a major constituent of the kafilas escorted by the Portuguese in and out of Goa. The Saraswat Brahmans of Goa also entered into land-based activities in this area, in retail trading and revenue farming, moneylending and shroffage. They became a favoured community in that port-city. The entry of this community into commerce appears to have been largely the result of Portuguese presence along the coast, for Saraswat Brahmans had no previous tradition of seaborne commerce.

There is also evidence in the kingdom of Ikkeri on the entry of previously non-commercial communities into commerce to take advantage of new opportunities. The growing rice trade provided an opportunity for those influential in administration as well as grantees of land to dominate supply. There is evidence of a group of privileged court merchants who were granted what amounted to a virtual monopoly on the sale of rice. When the Dutch attempted to purchase rice for export, they had to deal with these court merchants, whom they also called *pandidar*, suggesting that they were Brahman literati who may have been granted land rights and secured access to the surplus rice crop. Because of this monopoly, the purchase price for the Dutch was double that of the inland market price. In order to be free of this monopoly, they made representations to the court at Ikkeri and even threatened a blockade of the kingdom's port if they were not permitted to purchase freely in the market. It appears that Brahman land grantees and officials were collaborating with export merchants to maximize profits on the rice export. This also explains the growth of Konkani Brahman merchant communities along this coast and into Malabar.

Konkani Brahmans penetrated southwards in the course of the seventeenth century into Malabar, where, after the Dutch occupation of Cochin, they received favourable treatment. A Konkani merchant, Babha Prabhu, became an important supplier to the Dutch of pepper and rice and was allowed by them to sail in and out of the Dutch treaty ports of south Malabar, from which the more aggressive Mapilla Muslims and Gujaratis were barred. Prabhu's brother, son and other members of the family removed to Cochin and settled in the native quarters of this port, while also receiving rare honours in the Dutch town. He was sent as ambas-

sador on behalf of the Dutch to the Ikkeri court and to the Zamorin of Calicut, and seems to have completely transferred his allegiance to the Dutch. Because of this, he became close to the Dutch protege ruler, the Raja of Cochin, as his chief financial backer and keeper of his treasury. The Raja was increasingly impoverished and depended on Prabhu for loans and for the little income he brought to the kingdom by his trading activities. Prabhu's trading activities were primarily under Dutch protection and did not extend very much beyond the Dutch system. He traded with Sri Lanka, Tuticorin and the Madura ports, with Nagapatnam and with Portuguese Goa. Within Malabar his activities extended into the small pepper-producing ports and backwater stations and creeks, where he was authorized by the Dutch to purchase pepper and deliver it to them in Cochin at fixed prices.

The indigenous Malabar merchant community became fragmented and weakened in the course of the seventeenth century. The most powerful group among them were the Mapilla Muslims. The Mapillas operated in long-distance trade and in the peddling type of coastal trade. Their tightly knit political organization, claims to statehood and kingly power, and the collapse of these under Portuguese and Dutch attacks have been noted above. After the Dutch captured Cannanore, refortified it and forced a treaty on the Mapilla ruler Ali Raja, they became a fragmented community, trading from a number of ports in central and north Malabar. They were shipowners and excellent sailors, as well as being courageous fighters. They had access to good shipbuilding timber in Valarpatnam and the Mount Ely area, and sometimes had ships built in Surat. For coastal shipping they had fast *vallams* which outran European cruising vessels. Their ships were oar-powered as well as sail-powered, and they were among the earliest Indian shippers to arm their vessels with cannon. The Mapilla long-distance trade was to West Asia and to Bengal. They also had colonies and a special relationship with the Lakkhadive and Maldive Islands. Numbers of their small-scale shippers sailed to Madura Bay, Thanjavur ports in Coromandel, and to Sri Lanka. Continuous Dutch pressure made it difficult for the Mapillas and their leader, Ali Raja, to maintain their armed trade at previous levels. Some of these armed militants

of the sea took to piracy. The waters of Malabar and the coast upto Surat became unsafe in the middle decades of the century because of their activities.

The Hindu merchants of Malabar were never very strong in seaborne trade. In fact they did not feature in long-distance trade at all. At best they engaged in small-boat coastal traffic, southwards upto Madura and Thanjavur. They were mainly Tamil and Telugu Chetty castes (Komatties), many of whom were now settled in the Malabar and Kanara ports. Hindu merchants traded within Malabar, collecting and delivering pepper at the ports and taking import goods such as copper, spice and opium into the land. They had good relations with all the rulers of Malabar. A group that arose as merchants in the seventeenth century were the Pattar, a caste of Tamil Brahmans who had migrated through the Palghat gap from Tamil Nadu. They were settled by the Malabar kings on prime land and given administrative positions. They used these positions of privilege to get into commerce, mainly in the collection of pepper, out of which they made good profits. They used Nairs and Syrian Christians as intermediaries with the peasant pepper cultivators to get favourable terms in the purchase of pepper. Some of them were also linked to the Konkani Brahmans who were, as we saw earlier, exporters of pepper from the ports. They and the Konkanis controlled the revenue farms of Cochin and some other states.

Another group of Malabar merchants were the Jews, mainly settled in the port of Cochin. They became more important under the Dutch, who gave them greater freedom to trade to Malabar. They conducted whatever trade there was in Cochin, mainly under Dutch protection, to other Dutch settlements such as Sri Lanka. The Rahabbi family were recognized as leaders of the community and, in the second half of the seventeenth century, Ezekiel, the head of the family, was an influential figure in the commerce of Cochin.

It was seen earlier that Malabar rulers of the large and small principalities had themselves been merchants, owning and sailing ships on their own behalf. Their trade must have been carried out in collaboration with merchants. The Zamorin had close dealings with the Mapillas, while the southern rulers of Coylan, Kayam-

kulam and Attingal teamed up with Hindu merchants. All these rulers were affected by the Dutch domination of the seas in the second half of the century. The only ruler who carried on with any strength was the Zamorin, who utilized the Mapillas, Hindus as well as Gujaratis, to continue trading from his ports. Some evidence of his operations is available. It appears that he had a palace on the waterfront which he occupied during the trading season, and was physically present when major commercial deals were transacted. He also dealt personally with the European Companies. It may be assumed that several of the small rulers, both in north and south Malabar, took an active interest in commercial dealings. Later, in the eighteenth century, the King of Travancore emerged as an active merchant, conducting a trade monopoly of pepper and tobacco in his state, an action that fits in with the tradition of Malabar states, participation in trading.

Coromandel

Coromandel's merchant communities were rather more scattered than in the western coast, operating as they did over a lengthy coastline studded from north to south with ports and commercial outlets. Also, the hinterland from which they drew was lengthy, extending in a north–south grid at various distances from the coast. There was no major central place of activity comparable to Surat. Merchants were much more mobile, moving north and south and changing their locations as the commercial significance of places changed or the political climate for trade varied. With few exceptions, Coromandel merchants had deep roots in society and came from traditional castes or communities that had been active in commerce for generations. There was also a certain degree of sideways movement from castes in cognate professions into trade. This was caused by the stimulation of commerce in this period, creating expanded opportunities for merchants.

Hindus formed the great majority of those engaged in trade, though Muslims were significant in key sectors. At the beginning of the century long-distance shipping was in the hands of Hindus but Muslims, especially based in the port of Masulipatnam, were

beginning to expand their operations. Hindus of various Chetty sub-castes dominated the trade of all sectors. Like the Banyas of Gujarat, they proliferated in their sub-caste divisions, each tending to specialize in some sector of trade. This specialization was not, however, rigid. The two linguistic divisions of Telugu and Tamil Chetties were to be found in abundance, with very rarely Karnataka Chetties along the coast. Telugu Chetties were dominant in maritime trade in the seventeenth century and had migrated away from the Krishna–Godavari delta coast and hinterland—their homelands —to central and even south Coromandel. It was noted above that the Telugu Chetty caste, the Komatties, had even expanded to Kanara and Malabar. Three Telugu castes were dominant in overseas and coastal trading in this period—Balija Chetties, Beri Chetties and Komatties. Concentrated in south Coromandel and in the Madura Bay ports were Tamil Chetties engaged partly in overseas trade but mainly in commodity and inland trade, as also in moneylending. In the seventeenth century Tamil Chetties seemed to be losing out on the overseas trade to Telugu Chetties.

It must not be assumed that all Coromandel Hindu merchants came from the traditional commercial castes. There was considerable movement into trading in south India from several castes. Naturally, the major movement was from agricultural and martial castes. Thus, several merchants of this period had the suffix Nayak to their names. Several are known to be from the Vellala and Kanakapillai or writer castes. From the major agricultural and weaving districts they moved towards coastal towns as brokers and accountants, graduating towards trading on their own. Another caste group from which there was movement to trade was in the weaving castes, both in Telugu and Tamil. As textiles and cotton thread were major commodities of commerce, it was natural that those working in these should take to trade in these commodities. They are seen as brokers in the weaving villages and market towns, gradually going up the scale as exporters and wholesalers in the major ports. Another caste group from which there is movement into trade is the fisher and boatmen castes of coastal villages. They take to coastal small-boat trading and to servicing ships out in the roads of the large ports. The most important of these were the

Paravas of Madura Bay, who used their expertise in pearl-diving and boating to move into shipping and trade. They became major operators in the trade between Coromandel, Madura, Malabar and Sri Lanka. Under Portuguese dominion they became Catholics, augmenting their interests in the pearl fishery and in coastal trade under the Portuguese, and subsequently under Dutch protection.

Coromandel Muslims of diverse origins were a growing force in the trade of the coast in the period. Their growth was particularly concentrated in the overseas trading sector. It resulted from the eastward expansion of Golconda in the sixteenth century, after which Masulipatnam emerged as a major port of overseas trade in eastern India. Muslim merchants of varied provenance settled in and around this port. After a century of Golconda rule, they had become domiciled in the eastern Andhra districts and were referred to as Golconda Muslims. From the end of the sixteenth century there was an influx of Persian migrants from the Gulf ports, attracted by the fact that the Sultan of Golconda was a Shiah. Several of them came to occupy influential administrative positions in the state and, as was usual in this period, moved from administration to commerce, utilizing links with their home districts in Persia. They developed a shipping fleet of their own, based in Masulipatnam, and traded to the Persian Gulf, Burma and Siam and to Acheh, Bantam and Macassar in South East Asia. These Persians also became district officials, port governors and revenue farmers of surrounding districts. Persians were not the only expatriate Muslims. Masulipatnam reflected the cosmopolitan character of the Muslim merchant society of this period with Afghans, Pathans and Arabs among the merchants of the coast.

Another prominent Muslim merchant community concentrated in South Coromandel was the community referred to in contemporary records as Chulia Muslims. They were Tamil Muslims, descendants of Arab settlements of the earliest periods of Islamic trade in the Indian Ocean. They had become thoroughly naturalized and were based in a few major ports of Coromandel and Madura: Cuddalore, Porto Novo, Karikal, Nagore, Adirampatnam, Kilkarai, Tondy and Kayal. They had built up Islamic institutions in these Tamil districts and evolved a distinct Arabic-

Tamil Islamic culture of their own. At the same time, they developed close and friendly links with the Tamil Hindu states of the hinterland—Thanjavur, Madura, Ramnad. It was a primarily trading community but was stratified into divisions largely based on the scale of operations. Maraikkar may be considered the elite among them, with dominance in long-distance trade to South East Asia as well as shorter distance and coastal trading to Bengal, Andhra, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Another subgroup among them were the Labbais who engaged in both long-distance trading to South East Asia, coastal trading and peddling inland. Other subgroups engaged in a variety of commercial activities of a peddling nature inland, as well as turned to crafts such as weaving and leather-making. Since the Chulias had their own territorial autonomy in and around the ports where they lived, they developed a merchant fleet of large and small craft with security and self-assurance. They controlled the pearl-diving industry in the Indo-Ceylon straits and the territorial powers of the area had to come to terms with them to exploit this resource.

Coromandel merchants, with a few significant exceptions, were in the medium-to-small range of operators as overseas merchants. The exceptions were a few individuals: Mir Kamaluddin, a substantial fleet-owner of Masulipatnam in the first four decades of the century, Astrappah Chetty (or Malaya) likewise of the same period, and Abdul Qadir (or Periathamby Maraikkar) of the last decades of the century. There were other Muslim and Hindu merchants of medium scale who would own about three or four ships. Many of these merchants were single-owners. The vast majority, however, were not owners of ships but rented space in ships owned by others and sailed with small parcels of goods to the port of destination. Their ships operated out of several ports of central Coromandel; they did not centralize their activities in any one or other port. When European settlements appeared along the coast, these merchants would use these ports as well. They would also use European ships to freight their goods. It was the sum total of activities of these numerous merchants that added to the volume of trade of Coromandel. There was a substantial coastal trade operated by these merchants north and south.

Coromandel's Hindu merchants were also operating in various forms of internal trade based in the ports, servicing the seaborne trade as well as the inland trade. They dealt in a variety of commodities of export, making them available to the exporters at port in time for sailings. The most important of these were cotton textiles, the major export of the region, and merchants performed a vital role in linking the exporters with the producers. This business was done mainly by Hindu Chetty merchants, Telugu and Tamil, located in the immediate hinterland districts of ports such as Masulipatnam, Paleacat, Madras, Devenampatnam, Cuddalore, Pondicherry, Porto Novo and Nagapatnam. Because of the expansion of this business other castes also came into it in the second half of the seventeenth century. The merchants advanced considerable sums of money in the weaving villages, taking risks and developing ongoing relationships with the vast weaving districts spread all over Coromandel. The larger merchants used several lesser ones on a brokerage and commission basis; some of the latter came from the weaving castes. The merchants had to develop expert knowledge of the export markets as well as of the quality of the weave in the goods they were purchasing. When European investment in Coromandel expanded, the operations of these middlemen also increased enormously and, like those of Gujarat, they began to develop ongoing relationships with the Companies. They used the Companies' capital to supplement their own and adjusted to the demands of the new export markets.

As in the case of Gujarat, there was some degree of coming together of merchants and their world with the political domain in Coromandel as well. The Sultan of Golconda, coastal governors of his territories, havaldars of ports and military commanders, all invested in trade. To a smaller extent, this also happened in Bijapur, where officials of the eastern Karnatak province attempted to trade. In the Hindu kingdoms of the south the rulers did not do so directly but participated in the ventures of merchants. Among the most prominent of these 'political capitalists' with a high profile in the middle decades of the seventeenth century was Mir Muhamed Said, a prominent military general who rose to the high office of *sar samt* in the kingdom and was given the prestigious title of Mir Jumlah.

He had a fleet of upto about twelve ships operating from Masulipatnam and traded to many ports in South East Asia, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Surat. Mir Jumlah and a few others used their political positions to advantage in these trade activities. But they also used the services of merchants and provided some benefits to these merchants. Most importantly, they channelled capital into commerce and also invested in shipbuilding, thus adding to shipping capacity. Under the patronage of the Sultan of Golconda, the dockyards of Narsapore grew as a centre of shipbuilding on the Godavari; there were also others in this region.

The Hindu merchants of central and south Coromandel also had political influence with the Nayaks of their territories. In the first decades of the century, prominent Balija Chetty merchant families skilfully operated in the political turmoils in the last years of the Vijayanagar kingdom and the successor nayakdoms.

The most prominent example is Astrappah Chetty (or Malaya) and his extended family of brothers and nephews, who wove in and out of the worlds of commerce and politics. They secured protection from the rulers for their investments and gained revenue farms of key coastal districts and ports. This family provides one of the few examples of merchant build-up of military power, including private fortifications and stores of arms. This appears to have been possible only because of the collapse of political power in the surviving rump of the Vijayanagar empire and was not repeated in any other part of the continent. After the downfall of the Hindu states and the eastward expansion of Bijapur and Golconda, Hindu merchants established links with Islamic ruling elites of these two kingdoms. In Golconda they emerged as financiers, movers of money and revenue farmers, and helped the rulers transfer their resources into cash. Telugu Brahmans who had been village accountants under previous regimes now transferred their allegiance to the Islamic state. Two Brahman brothers, Madanna and Akanna, were dewans and treasurers for the Sultan of Golconda for many years. Telugu Chetty merchants worked closely with them in a mutual expansion of influence. In Bijapur too, Tamil and Telugu Chetties became close to provincial rulers and military lords and kept their commercial interests going. In the southern Hindu states, when Maratha

power intruded into the Arcot and Thanjavur districts, merchants made quick adjustments. Hindu merchants sought and were given protection by the Maratha rulers of Gingee and later the Maratha dynasty in Thanjavur. It was always a risk-bound relationship as the Marathas were notorious for their non-orthodox methods of tax-gathering and merchants were easy prey to replenish an empty treasury.

As a result of this close interlinkage between merchants and political elites, the merchants, at critical moments, were able to call upon political masters for assistance. Just as in Surat, when the shipping of Masulipatnam was threatened by the Dutch and the English, merchants were able to get some action out of the Golconda state. They used their influence in court to settle matters in dispute, so that trade could resume. Likewise, they put pressure on their fellow-merchants to settle disputes with the Dutch, to forestall Dutch action against the shipping of the port. Again, when the Dutch sought to restrict Coromandel sailing to South East Asia with passes and their cruising over ports of destination, merchants pressurized their respective states in intercede on their behalf. They were able to urge the governments of Golconda, Bijapur and Thanjavur to put pressure on the Dutch to be more liberal with passes. In the 1670s, when the French and Golconda were at war over San Thome, the French attacked and disrupted Masulipatnam shipping. On this occasion Masulipatnam merchants urged the government to come to terms with the French so that the French could lift the blockade of the port and let trade proceed. In the southern state of Ramnad, Maraikkar merchant interests persuaded the Thevar of Ramnad to pursue a policy of confronting the Dutch in the Palk Straits in order to keep the trade free for their shipping as well as for their pearl and chank-diving enterprises.

European settlement on the Coromandel coast affected Coromandel merchants in much the same way as it had affected those of Gujarat. The initial hostility was absent because the Portuguese were not present in any dominant manner and the Companies, in the initial phase, did not compete with Indian merchants. Indeed these merchants were generally favourable to the opening of European factories and functioned as their sponsors with state

governments. For most of the century, merchants combined business with Europeans with their own individual businesses in the Asian sector. Business with Europeans was becoming increasingly attractive because of the provision of substantial credit by the companies and the continuity of demand. On the other hand, as they secured greater knowledge of the textile industry, the Companies were driving hard bargains and strove to keep prices down. They were much more exacting as to quality and kept merchants on their toes. It is difficult to estimate the profit margins enjoyed by merchants in their dealings with Europeans. Brokers seem to have enjoyed under 5 per cent. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century there was a tendency for merchants to physically locate themselves in European enclaves such as Madras, Paleacat or Nagapatnam. This is a phenomenon not prevalent on the west coast. In Gujarat and in Bombay, the only English settlement was far removed from the theatre of commercial activity. In Malabar, Dutch ports were not centres of growth. Consequently, we see in Coromandel new institutional relationships emerging between the Europeans and Indian merchants. This was happening in both English and Dutch settlements.

Merchants who developed long-standing relationships with the two Companies were given somewhat favourable treatment in their ports. They were given first preference over export orders and import commodities. In Madras, the position of Chief Merchant was instituted for a leading Indian merchant and he enjoyed some social privileges as well. Open as well as clandestine commercial dealings were entered into between senior Company officials and these leading merchants. It was more prevalent in English settlements, but it existed in Dutch ports as well, despite such trade being illegal in the Dutch Company's system. These joint ventures became more common in the last quarter of the seventeenth century and were generally between English and Portuguese merchants and the Hindu merchants of Coromandel. It appears that the Hindu overseas merchants of Coromandel, seeing the pressure of competition in trade (especially to South East Asia) and the results of Dutch exclusive policies, were at first turning to the English for joint

ventures and then phasing themselves out of shipping into servicing export/import trade in the ports and hinterland.

A practice widespread in European settlements in Coromandel was the formation of joint-stocks of Indian merchants who were functioning as supply merchants to the Companies. It was promoted on the initiative of the Companies to bring about a community of interest among merchants dealing with them and prevent competitive bidding in the weaving towns so as to push up prices. It was also intended to provide stability and continuity in the supply of textiles. A further aim was to encourage merchants to provide their own stock rather than to rely solely on advances provided by the Companies. It seemed to have progressed reasonably well in the last decades of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. The Companies kept some control over the accounts of the joint-stock but could not prevent their constant break-up and reformation. The Coromandel merchant world was so volatile and fluid that it was not conducive to the emergence of permanent business arrangements with the kind of legal sanctions that the Europeans were trying to impose.

It was noted above that Coromandel merchants were a mobile group and that mobility was pronounced up and down the coast, and between port and hinterland. There was also a degree of transitory migration and short-term settlement overseas, particularly in South East Asia. Golconda Muslim merchants, especially of Persian origin, settled in the seventeenth century in Mergui, Tenasserim and around Ayuthya. Chulia Muslims were settled in Tenasserim, the Kra Isthmus, the tin islands of Ujang Selang and Bangery, Kuala Kedah, Perak and Dindings, Melaka, Johore and Acheh. Hindu Chetty settlements which had been more prevalent in the sixteenth century tended to phase out in the seventeenth, probably with the decline of their overseas trading. Close to home, both Tamil Muslims and Hindus were settled in large numbers in Sri Lanka. Little is known of the nature of these settlements. There is some evidence that both the Golconda Muslims and the Chulias made local marriage alliances and raised families there. In the case of the Chulias, it is likely that prominent Maraikkar trading families

had a member of the family established in a residence with servants and all facilities in or near these ports. The Indian quarter in the port of Melaka was a separately identifiable part of that port.

Armenians spread in numbers in Coromandel in the seventeenth century, settling mainly in Madras and to a lesser extent in Masulipatnam. They had good relations with Indian rulers, especially in Golconda, where their trade was welcomed and encouraged. They had a fleet of ships operating in these waters in long-distance trade, eastward into South East Asia and westward to Surat and the Persian Gulf. They also entered into commodity brokerage, for which purpose they had good connections with Indian merchants. Their facility with the language and culture of the Shiah state of Golconda helped them in their inland transactions. They did not hesitate to travel well into the interior of the country on business. They provided a linkage between Europeans and Indians, sometimes helping to iron out problems between them, as in the crisis between Golconda and the French in Masulipatnam in 1674.

The 1690s was a decade of crisis and challenge to the Coromandel merchant community. The destruction of the two southern Islamic states of Golconda and Bijapur in 1685–7 upset the world in which the merchant had operated with reasonable success. The structure of reciprocal arrangements between the political wing and the commercial sector had come down, leaving merchants exposed to new political alignments. The Mughals had great difficulty establishing a stable administration in Golconda and Bijapur in the 1690s. This was the crucial hinterland area of commercial operations for Coromandel merchants. The producing centres for their exports were there, as were the markets for their imports. Merchants who had operated comfortable revenue farms in producing areas found new revenue authorities imposed on these districts. They had to come to terms with these new authorities. Two new power centres, one in Hyderabad and the other in Arcot, had to be dealt with. These changes had repercussions to the far south, where also new alignments arose among the Hindu kingdoms. It was a decade of widespread and sweeping changes with which merchants as a

community were forced to cope. On their ability to do this would depend their survival into the eighteenth century.

Bengal

The expansion of the commerce of Bengal meant a natural expansion of the merchant groups that transacted this commerce. The province was being administratively incorporated into the Mughal empire. Merchants adjusted to the new power structure and to the elites who controlled it. Merchants had, in the preceding century, come to terms with the Portuguese and traded under their protection. They were hampered by the relative insecurity of the waters of the Delta and powerless against piratical attacks on their shipping by Portuguese adventurers, Maghs and Arakanese. The expansion of merchant participation in overseas trade grew from the 1630s with the establishment of Mughal control over Hughli. Merchant fleets gathered together in the three ports of Hughli, Balesore and Pipeli. Considerable shifting of the course of the rivers and tributaries of the delta had led to the relocation of ports and consequently of shipping fleets owned by merchants. Merchants took some time to regroup themselves and re-establish their seaborne trade in the newly developing ports of the province.

There is no clear evidence on the origins of the Bengal merchant communities as they evolved in the seventeenth century or of their relationship to traditional and older groups in Bengal society. Unlike the Gujarati Banyas or Coromandel Chetties, no caste continuities can be established with the older merchant communities of Bengal. The prominent Hindu merchant families that featured in the seventeenth century, both in overseas trade and in inland commodity trade, were sprung from Gujarati migrants. Major shipowners such as Khemchand Shah and Chintaman were from this community. There were a few of them in long-distance trade, mainly based in the port of Balesore. Many more Hindus were engaged in the supply trade in the ports and in wholesale trade in the major import commodities. Hindus dominated this sector of trade. They were middlemen and brokers for the export trade in

Bengal silk, and for cotton textiles of the fine and coarse varieties. They had links with the silk and textile weaving villages and market towns through a network of sub-contractors and agents. The dominant suppliers defrayed large sums of money in the weaving villages, made advance orders and took control of the product. They supplied the exporters—both Europeans and Asians—by contract. These same merchants also controlled the wholesale market in import goods. These imports were brought in by European and Asian shippers—spices, pepper, tin, copper.

Another area in which Hindus, again migrant Gujaratis and Marwaris, dominated was in finance, shroffage, minting and money transfer across distances. Here the caste connections with large houses in the Gangetic plains and in Gujarat helped. As trade picked up and specie of various origins came into the country in large numbers, shroffage and the exchange market became active, and several merchants began to specialise in these activities. The large scale export/import trade created a demand for capital, and in the ports and inland market towns there was need for credit on the part of commodity merchants. The Companies also entered into this capital market, both as borrowers and as sellers of bullion for re-minting. As the Mughals established revenue-raising mechanisms, this revenue had to be transferred to grantees living in the interior on the road to Agra and Delhi, and to the emperors in the capital itself. Further, as the demand for goods in the interior grew—rice, opium, saltpetre, sugar—for export on a large scale, capital had to be transferred to the producing centres. All this resulted in a quickening of activity in the financial sectors. A few large houses arose based in Bengal to capture a major share of this business. These people were very close to the Mughal ruling elites of Bengal. They lent and borrowed from them, transferred capital on their behalf to distant parts, provided venture capital for their overseas voyages and bought revenue farms from them. Towards the end of the seventeenth century one of these houses, that of Manik Chand, had become very close to the subahdar and the Mughal revenue administration. In the eighteenth century, Emperor Farukhsiyar conferred on him the title of Jagat Seth or 'merchant of the world'. His family continued as major props of

the nawabs of Bengal as well as their finance through most of that century.

In the seventeenth century Bengal Muslim merchants rose as a powerful overseas trading group with extensive connections in South East Asia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Surat and West Asia. They were as cosmopolitan a group as any of the Islamic merchants of the subcontinent. The backbone of the community were descendants of Islamic settlers from the sultanate period of Bengal's history. They had established themselves in several delta ports and islets, building up a fleet of coasting and long-distance vessels. After the Mughal conquest their numbers were added to by settlers from other parts of India, including Gujarat. The major growth of Bengal Muslim merchant enterprise was caused by an extensive participation in it by Mughal administrative officials. From the 1640s Mughal officials appointed to high office in the Subah of Bengal saw that they could considerably add to their incomes by carrying on overseas trade. So they began to develop a close relationship with the existing Muslim overseas merchants. They used their position and capital to secure for themselves a share in the trade. The list of those participating in trade reveals a wide spectrum of officialdom, right upto the last decade of the century. In the early decades Prince Muhammad Shuja, when he was subahdar of the province, inaugurated the practice of this highest official engaging in extensive commerce. This was carried on by his successor, Mir Mohamed Said, the Mir Jumlah of Golconda, who had defected to the Mughals and who brought over his shipping and trading interests successfully developed in Masulipatnam. His successor, Shaista Khan, who held the subahdarship for many years, also engaged in overseas trading through his agents and dependents.

Besides the subahdars of Bengal, a number of other officials appear as shipowners and sea-borne traders. There were nawabs of Dacca and of the neighbouring provinces of Bihar and Orissa, and diwans of these places. Faujdars and havaldars of the ports of Hughli, Balesore and Pipely engaged vigorously in trade. The shahbandars of these ports were also shipowners and merchants. Om Prakash has estimated that a great proportion of ships based in Bengal, especially of those trading to South East Asia, belonged to

Mughal officials. It is not clear from the evidence how these officials conducted their overseas operations. They certainly appear to have had ships built out of their own resources, as did the ruling groups of Golconda and on the west coast in Surat. These ships were of substantial tonnage, being around 400 to 600 tonnes and designed for long-distance voyages. They must have had merchants either in their employ or in some kind of partnership to carry out the actual transaction of business in Bengal and in the overseas ports. In ships owned by them, the nachoda appears as both the captain in charge of sailing as well as of commercial transactions. It is possible that several Bengal Muslim merchants moved to a position of dependence on the nobles, as managers of their trade, rather than trading on their own behalf. It is a point of speculation whether this intensive participation in trade by officials had a negative effect on the growth of independent Bengali merchant enterprise.

Some evidence of this appears towards the end of our period, the 1690s, when official and noble participation in the trade of Bengal suddenly stopped. This led to a reduction in the total volume of shipping of Bengal ports, especially of the long-distance traffic to South East Asia. Whatever traffic is left appears to be mainly in the hands of merchants not based in Bengal. For example, the Gujarat–Bengal traffic is mainly operated by Gujaratis and the coastal Coromandel traffic in the hands of Golconda and Chulia merchants. The only Bengal merchant group that continued to trade into the eighteenth century were the Hindus who, as seen earlier, were Gujarati migrants. The Shahs continued in long-distance trade to Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

On the other hand, participation in trade by the political élites had its positive impact on the commerce of Bengal. At the outset it helped in the consolidation of trade after the Portuguese hold on the waters of the Delta had been removed. It put the safety of the coastal and riverine waters as a prime aim of imperial policy. Successive subahdars of Bengal, chiefly Shaista Khan, put much energy into providing for merchants the freedom of these waters against Arakanese and Mugh pirates, and the conquest of Chittagong in 1664 was a major stage in this policy. By putting resources into shipbuilding, it augmented the shipping capacity of Bengal

trade. Large ships built from the middle decades were more suitable for the developing Bengal trade of the Indian Ocean. Its exports were now bulk commodities such as rice, sugar, edible oils and saltpetre. Also, by this means resources accumulated by the nobles from land and other revenues came into commerce. Shaista Khan, for example, instructed his managers to set apart a certain proportion of the regular revenue collection which was to be sent to his commercial agents in the silk and cotton weaving centres, to be invested in goods for export. Nobles directed regular sailings of their vessels to Sri Lanka and Acheh to procure elephants. This was in order to add to their military capacity and ceremonial presence in society.

As in other parts of the subcontinent, merchants benefited in some ways from the influence that accrued to them through political connections. After the Portuguese were reduced by the Mughals and allowed to trade peacefully in Bengal, their protection on the seas was useful to merchants, though Portuguese power had begun to wane after the 1640s. When the Dutch attempted to restrict Bengal shipping in Burmese ports, Acheh and Kedah, in the 1640s, merchants were able to use their influence with the Mughal officials of Bengal to force them to change their attitude. On a few occasions, Mughal officials attacked or laid siege to Dutch factories in Pipeli and Balesore as well as in other parts of Bengal, to redress grievances which merchants bore against them. Frequently, these were occasions when the interests of merchants and officials coincided, leading to a rapid solution of the problem that arose. It was this deep involvement of officials in trade that kept them on guard against penetration inland by the Companies. When this guard was removed at the end of the century, conditions were more favourable for their carrying the trading frontier inland if they so desired.

Bengal merchants' relationships with Europeans proceeded along lines similar to other regions of the subcontinent. It was only in the second half of the century that any intensive relationship developed. When this happened, Bengal merchants moved to take advantage of the opportunities offered. They began an expanding export trade of the Companies in silk and cotton textiles, saltpetre and opium. Merchant suppliers came in to fulfill European export

orders through advance contracts with producers. The large-scale supply merchants, such as Khemchand and Mathuradas, used their own capital, but as quantities increased they had to rely on advances from the Companies as well. A regular contractual relationship developed with the Dutch and the English, by which annual contracts were made for the supply of raw silk, cotton muslins and calicos for the European and Asian markets. As the European import trade developed, these merchants began to specialize in the wholesaling of commodities which they bought in bulk from the Companies and distributed to inland markets. The commodities involved were spices, copper, tin, pepper, lead and broadcloth.

By the last quarter of the century this trade had settled down to a steady pattern, and a group of merchants had emerged as permanent suppliers and brokers to the two Companies. A few merchants succeeded in dominating the trade in imported commodities, such as spices and copper. In spite of attempts by the Dutch to break their hold, they continued as the major distributors of these commodities. As in Madras, one of these leading merchant contractors was given the title of Chief Merchant. Thus, Khemchand was Chief Merchant to the English for several years and was succeeded by Mathuradas. But unlike in Madras, which was an English settlement and where the English could confer privileges on the Chief Merchant, this was not possible in Hughli or other Bengal ports. Nor did merchants show any dependence on the English or the Dutch. These merchants were powerful individuals with a multifarious trade of their own. Their dealings with the Companies was a minor part of their operations. As a result, Companies could not impose on the merchants, as they tended to do in Madras. Nor was there any attempt to organise them into joint-stocks, as happened in Madras. Perhaps it was not necessary to do this, given that individual merchants were wealthy enough to contract for large proportions of the annual demand of each Company. Besides, in no way would these merchants have subjected themselves to the direction of the officials of the Company.

There is some evidence of collusion between Bengal merchants and the English in defrauding Mughal customs. This is the beginning of a problem that was to intensify in the eighteenth century.

The English had a vaguely worded freedom from customs duties in inland customs posts for their export goods. Some joint trade between English and Bengal merchants was beginning, utilizing this freedom from duties claimed by the English. At first it was English Company officials who were indulging in it. They were being supplied commodities from inland by Bengal merchants and middlemen, who would share in the profits of the venture. The goods were covered as belonging to the English Company, and came free of duty from the production centres. This trade was limited to the Bay of Bengal ports and embraced rice, opium and some coarse textiles suitable for Asian markets. The shipping would be European or Indian owned, or owned in partnership. This was the early beginnings of a commercial relationship between Europeans and Bengalis.

The mounting evidence of the roles of merchant and the part played by commerce contradicts the present tendency to isolate them from the rest of society, demarcating their world from the political universe. What we see here is the operation of an integrated world of political economy in which merchants perform politico-economic roles intrinsic to the states in which they lived. The merchant section of society is seen to be dynamic, possessing a great deal of mobility. It is a very plural society, with entrenched features of tradition and custom as well as considerable volatility, introduced by elements of political and social change. The merchants' sphere of operations had expanded in the seventeenth century, and their customary expertise appears to have been stretched to the limit. Commerce had no doubt expanded, but it had also become very competitive, with a new dimension introduced by European enterprise. The changing political framework introduced other challenges which necessitated adjustments and the redrawing of relationships. At the end of the century, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Indian merchant found himself vulnerable. This vulnerability was seen both on the ocean and in the interior of the subcontinent.

8

States and Commerce

In spite of the immense variety of political systems in the Indian subcontinent in the seventeenth century, it is possible to see some common threads in the attitudes of states to commerce in their jurisdiction. The Mughal imperial state controlled two core trading areas—Gujarat and Bengal—for the entire century and extended its hold towards the last decades into Bijapur and Coromandel coastal sectors. In these sectors, for most of the century, the two Islamic states of Golconda and Bijapur were the controlling agents of trade. They had a broad generic similarity to the policies of the Mughal empire, both being governed by an adherence to Islamic principles of polity and economy. In the far south of the peninsula were the Hindu Nayakdoms which had broken free of the Vijayanagar empire and controlled important parts of the coast and hinterland. Even here, there was no significant difference in approach to commerce and attitudes of the state to commerce. In all these states the foundation of the economy was agriculture and rural production provided the greatest share of the revenues of the state. Commerce was an additional factor in the state's revenues, if at some periods an important addition.

The only group of states which differed in any marked manner from the norm in the subcontinent were those on the Malabar coast, where the fulcrum of power was well situated on the littoral rather than in the interior. The two classic examples of this were the kingdoms of Calicut and Cochin but there were numerous others in varying stages of independence or autonomy: the Kolastiri, the Ommetiri, Ali Raja, Kayamkulam, Attingal, Quilon, Travancore. In all these states, the capital was located on or near a port or estuary. Their geographic size was small, much smaller even than the smallest of the kingdoms in the rest of India. Agriculture and rural production were important activities but they resulted in commerce and it was this commerce that added value to the

product. The revenues that accrued to the state and thus its relative power would depend on the size of this commerce. It must be added, however, that in respect of the forms of state power, these states (with the exception of Ali Raja) remained essentially Hindu, thus no different from the Nayakdoms across the Ghats.

In general, the pre-modern state, with few significant exceptions, allowed for the existence of a variety of autonomous institutions and spheres of operation beneath its umbrella of sovereignty. Recent historical literature tends to underplay the centralizing tendencies of states in the subcontinent in the medieval, pre-colonial periods, and has revealed a variety of regional systems and sub-systems that operated in the so-called empires of the time. The sphere of commerce, between coastal port and overseas destinations and between littoral and hinterland, was one such area of self-regulating existence. By the beginning of the seventeenth century India had become tied to an international system of commercial exchange that embraced Asia and the Atlantic. Indian states were drawn, willy-nilly, into this system and needed only to fashion policies that exploited some of the benefits of this exchange for themselves. Within India, this international commerce intensified already-existing interchanges between littoral and hinterland and between one coast and another. The states could affect the performance of this trading network by their policies. They could encourage or stifle commerce but could not control it. Its operations depended on several factors which were external to the state and to those elements under its immediate control. The commerce—both overseas and inland—was driven by market forces of demand and supply. To this, states could contribute in some form but could not control it. The forces that went into production of exportable goods had to be driven by economic incentives. The agents of commerce—merchants, shippers and financiers—were also largely independent of the state. Ports, markets and producing centres had an existence of their own and could not be directed by the state. The multiple outlets of commerce and their interlinked character made them immune from direct interference. Yet the state and its activities could and did have an impact on commerce in important ways.

The provision of an infrastructure that could lead to the smooth

functioning of commercial transactions was one of these. In general, Indian states did not realize the importance of infrastructure development. This is seen best in their attitudes to the development of ports in their territories. Most states attempted to provide an efficient administration in the ports. In the Mughal system, the major outlet port was *khalsa* land and was directly administered by an imperial appointee. Other ports came under the governance of the provincial or regional governor or lessee of revenues of the lands in which it was located. In the latter case, and even in the former, since annual revenue-raising was the prime concern, no attempt was made to spend on large-scale structures of long-term benefit. Very few of the ports in our period show any waterfront buildings of importance that could facilitate trade. There is some evidence of attention to water outlets and estuaries to facilitate movement of loading barges from the ships on the roads. There are some examples of the construction of causeways and bridges so that carts could bring goods nearer to the wharves. Sufficient attention seems to have been paid to storage facilities. All the major ports had substantial storehouses where Indian and foreign merchants could store goods in bulk. And, of course, customs posts were solidly built, such as the one at Surat.

Neither the Mughals nor any of the other Indian states seem to have paid sufficient attention to the defence of these ports. Where it was done, it was defence works on the land side of the port. Defending the waterfront side of the port does not appear to have been developed, unlike South East Asia where Melaka, in the fifteenth century, had defence structures in place on the waterside. The Mughal port of Surat had a large standing army in position under a commander but none of the other ports had this. Some of the rulers of Kanara and Malabar began to pay attention to the defence of ports after the Portuguese intrusion in the sixteenth century. Masulipatnam had a small defence force at its disposal, which was stationed in the havaldar's quarters about five miles inland. All the states appear to have paid attention to policing and law and order in ports, a necessary condition for commerce. In the smaller ports of the south, law and order were the responsibility of a *paleakaran* (polygar), a military lord of the near hinterland. In

general, the evidence for the seventeenth century is that Indian ports were noted for their good record in law and order and the peaceful ownership of property.

Then there was the question of the approaches to the port from the hinterland, which had to be both convenient and safe. States seem to have paid adequate attention to this, given the constraints of contemporary technology. Surat was accessible by several trunk roads from the north-west, west and south. Of course, for some distance the river served as the main feeder link. The state of Golconda put in place a system of roads linking Masulipatnam and other coastal ports with the capital city, Golconda, and with numerous market towns in the hinterland. In central Coromandel, roads linked the coastal ports of Paleacat and Devanampatnam with interior weaving and grain-producing centres. In Hindustan the major centres were linked through trunk roads kept in good repair for vehicular traffic. Trans-peninsular routes, initiated under the Bahmani sultanates, were continued by their successors, linking east coast with west and opening new markets for eastern textiles and diamonds. It was through these routes that the *banjara* ox caravans passed, bringing much-needed raw cotton to Godavari weaving centres. Security on these trunk routes was always a problem but was given attention by the states. On the trunk routes, security was a central responsibility discharged through co-ordination with regional or local lords and chieftains. Thus when the central government lost its hold on the country, brigandage broke out on the highways. During these periods, merchants and European Companies organized private protection for their caravans.

The fiscal policies of the state had the greatest impact on commerce and, in general, the states of this period were well aware of it. All states imposed customs duties on imports and exports at the port, administering these in a variety of ways. Duties were very low in most parts of India—from 3 per cent to 5 per cent—but appear to have been higher in Malabar and Kanara where they could be 7 per cent or even 10 per cent. The Mughals had a differential tax between Hindu and Muslim merchants. Then there were anchorage fees for ships, depending on their capacity, which were standard and low throughout India. At most ports there were also

mint duties and customs on the import of bullion. Customs duties are estimated to have amounted to only 1 per cent of the total revenue of the Mughal empire. Customs were collected directly by appointees of the state, where they accrued directly to the ruler. Where they were granted to someone or leased out for a lump sum of money, the grantee or lessee made arrangements for the collection and administered it through his appointees in the customs office. In Golconda, at times, Brahman accountants were appointed as collectors by the Muslim nobles to whom the taxes had been assigned. If the ruler had granted exemption from customs to any traders, this amount was deducted from the total sum that the grant would yield. Rulers were aware of the use of fiscal measures as incentives in promoting the growth of particular ports. If they wanted to encourage import and export from a particular port, they would abolish or reduce customs at that port.

Except in Malabar, rulers did not concern themselves directly with port affairs. The port and its administration enjoyed an autonomy, encouraged generally by its great distance from the seat of royal power. The port and the coast enjoyed a certain degree of liberalism in their governance. People could come and go freely, set themselves up in enclaves, even plant their culture without interference in a manner impossible in the interior. To some extent, communities governed themselves, a state of affairs which was particularly valuable to merchants who wished to live in anonymity. Neither the rulers nor the merchants invested in opulent structures in the port or littoral, though such wealth passed through these areas into the interior to be enjoyed by them in some way or the other.

Customs duties levied at ports were only one of the more direct benefits accruing to a state from commerce. There were others, both direct and indirect. For the movement of goods to and from ports, along the highways, there were transit and road duties (*radhari*), generally collected by the lessee of the revenues of that district. As the volume of trade increased, so did the amounts collected. There is a problem here as to whether the multiplicity of these transit collection points hindered trade, both by the incidence of taxation and by the delays it caused on the road. In the hinterland

of Masulipatnam, European Company officials were complaining in the 1660s of a multiplicity of *sunkams* put up by lessees and sub-lessees of revenue along the roads to that port. Another commerce-related tax was the market duty levied at town and country markets. In market towns proximate to the ports and those fed by the ports, the increase of sea-borne commerce led to increases in revenue from this tax. Indirectly, there was the tax on artisans, especially the loom tax, the proceeds of which would have increased during the period of expanding commerce. Now and then states attempted to put up the loom tax on the grounds that weavers were earning much more at that time by the export trade. Other artisans connected with the textile industry were taxed collectively as a caste, such as painters, dyers and washermen. Then there was the tax on the sale of bullion, which also yielded increasing returns in the course of the century. An index to the returns from taxation on commerce-related activities was the increase in the yield on the revenue farms of these areas. Evidence available for Masulipatnam shows that revenues farmers were bidding higher for the port's revenues. In 1621 the havaldar leased this farm for 15,000 Pagodas (or 10 per cent) more than its previous value.

Another coast-related activity which produced good returns to the state was the salt monopoly. This was everywhere a state monopoly which was then leased out to the highest bidder, or, in exceptional cases, the state carried out salt trade on its own. The Masulipatnam salt farm was worth about 75,000 Pagodas. The lessee then conducted the trade in salt himself, or sublet it to salt merchants who carried out the trade by sea and land. Another marine resource that was a state monopoly was the pearl and chank fishery located on the far southern coast of India. The Nayak of Madura and the Thevar of Ramnad shared these rights and leased them to groups of specialist divers who were themselves controlled by merchants. The rulers had pre-emptive rights of purchase over pearls of quality, and sometimes exported pearls and chanks on their own account to overseas markets in Persia and Bengal. They did this through the medium of merchants who were usually engaged in that trade.

Among indirect benefits from commerce could be noted the

growth in population of the port and the immediate coastline, and the revenues brought by personal taxation of a variety of service people attracted to it. All ports had a substantial number of boatmen and fishermen, and an increasing number of labourers. Artisans such as carpenters, stone masons, goldsmiths and others flocked to the ports. All these were taxed on a caste basis and the caste heads were used in collecting the taxes and paying the state. More indirectly, the increase in agricultural production of goods that came into commerce would lead to increases in land revenue in these districts. Thus the commerce in rice, wheat, sugar, cotton and indigo resulted in increased revenue to the state in the regions of production. These benefits were spread across the entire subcontinent in all states where overseas trade was carried on, with consequential effects in other sectors of economic activity. Thus the areas of the subcontinent where states enjoyed increased revenues out of commercial activity at various periods in the seventeenth century may be identified as follows: Surat and the extensive hinterland into Sind, the Gangetic valley, Baroda and Burhanpur; Dhabul, Basrur, Bhatkal, Mangalore and the rice-producing Kanara lowlands; the Malabar ports and the pepper lowlands; Nagapatnam, Porto Novo, Cuddalore and the Thanjavur and south Arcot delta lands; Devanampatnam, Sadraspatnam, Paleacat, Madras and the Arcot hinterland; Masulipatnam, Nizampatnam and the Krishna/Godavari delta; Balesore, Pipeli, Hughli and the entire subah of Bengal.

Among indirect benefits to the state from commerce were the access to goods of foreign origin that were consumed by ruling groups within it, as well as contributing to economic activity, which in turn benefited the state. Among luxury goods of consumption to the affluent elite there were silks, tapestries, carpets, perfumes, porcelain, coral, cut glass and precious stones. Merchants who traded in these knew that they had to be made available to rulers and their dependents with or without profit. To merchants, it was sometimes a way to purchase influence. Then there were horses and elephants, two important items of trade in the seventeenth century, which again were sold primarily to rulers, nobles and those allied to them. Horses were important in the context of seventeenth

century military power, and the Mughals ensured that there was a steady supply of Persian and Arab horses for their cavalry. Other rulers who purchased horses were those of Bijapur, Golconda, Thanjavur and Madura. Elephants were also increasingly becoming an element in the armed forces of Indian powers, especially the Mughals, in the second half of the century. Consequently, the import of elephants increased from the 1650s, and rulers were encouraging trade in these animals. In the south, elephants were used for ceremonial purposes and were essential in royal and temple processions. Similarly, slaves and eunuchs imported in ships from Africa, through Arabia, were purchased by ruling groups. The numbers were not large, but there was always a demand for them and most ships would carry a few dozen slaves to be sold in Surat.

A very important benefit to the state from overseas trade was the import of bullion through the ports into the interior. Silver and gold, both as precious metal and in the form of specie from different regions, poured into India in the seventeenth century through the medium of trade. This was encouraged and promoted by rulers at every opportunity. Precious metal came from West Asia; this was partly of African and Mediterranean origin, partly in the form of Turkish and Persian coins of silver and gold. Even Russian and Hungarian coins found their way into India in this way. From South East Asia, the mainland kingdoms yielded Burmese and Siamese coins. Burma gave gold and gold dust. A Chinese copper coin, the pitje, came through Burma in large quantities to Golconda. From the Malay peninsula and inland South East Asia came gold and gold dust, as well as coins minted in these states. From the second half of the seventeenth century, a new source of silver was that of South America coming via the Philippines. After European trade picked up, there was a further source of bullion, again of South American origin, coming from Europe, brought by the English, Dutch, Danish and French Companies. Copper itself was brought through overseas trade to supply the mints of Indian states. Trade also supplied material for a non-metallic coinage—cowries from the Maldives and badam from Persia. Thus, states open to overseas trade had no shortage of metal for coinage. It enabled them to maintain a supply of money in this period adequate

to their particular needs of taxation and consumption, as well as to general economic activity in the community.

In the discussion of the trade of the four major regions, plenty of evidence emerged of direct state intervention to establish the freedom of trade of its subjects and to keep open its ports and its sea-lanes. It may be useful to bring this evidence together as a portrayal of certain common attitudes among Indian states to commerce in their jurisdiction. Indian states were obviously interested in maintaining freedom of trade and acted, often decisively, when this was threatened. The Mughals, as the premier state in the subcontinent, are a typical example of this. In Bengal, where during the early part of this century there were serious threats to freedom of trade of the delta, they acted with some long-term planning and even invested substantially in the provision of armed protection. Unable to take on the Portuguese and the Arakanese, the main threats to free navigation in the early decades, they bided their time, concluded strategic alliances with regional coastal and riverine rulers and assembled some semblance of power in the area. When their efforts against the Arakanese were not successful on water, they realized that the only course was to ally with the Portuguese who had earlier been a serious menace. They moved to dislodge the Portuguese from Hughli but made friends with them immediately. Both the Mughals and their local governors invested in the construction of a flotilla, for which they got technological help from Portuguese renegades. The long-term consequences of this investment was the growth of the trade of Bengal from the 1670s. Traditional Mughal military strategy was adapted to the situation of the Delta with the construction of a number of forts at strategic points on creeks to prevent raids by Magh and Arakanese pirates. Though in many instances their forts proved ineffective against sudden raids, they reveal an attempt to respond appropriately to challenges as they arose.

In the first three decades of the century the Mughals engaged in some tight-rope walking to deal with a difficult situation confronting the trade of Surat and Gujarat. They had to move delicately between the three aggressive European trading powers, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English, each of which would have

desired the domination of that trade. They sought to utilize each of these powers at different times against the others, and came through that crisis with Surat as a freer trade emporium than before. The Mughals would have clearly loved to drive the Portuguese out of Diu, and though they made overtures to the two Company powers for a joint attack, they did not push through with this. This was probably due to an apprehension that they might then replace one power—a declining one—with another, a growing one. By the 1630s the Mughals were convinced that the trade of the two Company powers was beneficial to Surat but that, at the same time, they should be extremely vigilant to keep them both within proper bounds. Thus, for example, they never permitted the slightest attempt to fortify the Company's residences or to carry arms around on the person of Company servants.

The biggest crisis that faced the Mughal empire in respect of freedom of navigation was in the 1640s, when the Dutch attempted to take on the mantle of the Portuguese naval domination to control and redirect the trade of the Indian Ocean. It was directed at both the east and west coast trading ports and, if successful, would have led to the collapse of India's overseas trade. The Dutch denied ships leaving the ports of Gujarat and Bengal passes to sail to South East Asian ports on the ostensible grounds that they were at war with the sultanates of Atjeh, Perak and Kedah. The long-term aim was that Indians would be discouraged from trading eastwards so that they could engross all those markets for themselves and be the sole suppliers of Indian goods. The policy was operated for a period in all Indian ports and resisted even by the smaller states, such as Bijapur, Golconda and Thanjavur. But it was Mughal resistance over a number of years, from 1648 to 1652, which forced the Dutch to abandon the policy. The Dutch showed they meant business by blockading Surat and seizing ships as prizes. The Mughals retaliated on land against Dutch factories and their officers. In this stand-off, the trade of both parties was suspended. The message was clear to the Dutch, that if they were to continue to be permitted trade privileges in Mughal territory, they had to respect the right of Mughal subjects to sail the seas. In Bengal, where hostilities had not broken out between the two, it was made clear to the Dutch

that their lucrative trade was in danger. Imperial directives had been sent out to obstruct Dutch trade. These were followed by all regional officials. The Mughals were, however, anxious that the issue should be settled soon. The Dutch held some of the Indian capital ships and their cargo. With every delay in sailing, valuable profit was being lost. So the Emperor settled with the Dutch, granting them a farman in which he assured them that Surat ships would not sail to Acheh. This was, however, a ploy, and as soon as the Dutch blockade was lifted, Surat ships began to sail to South East Asia. Imperial officials put great pressure on the Dutch for passes both in Gujarat and in Bengal. By 1652 the Dutch had given in and issued passes freely. Trade resumed.

The smaller states took steps according to their own potential. Gujarat and Bijapur faced upto the Dutch and, though they did not have the leverage on land that the Mughals had, their rulers too acted in similar fashion. They pressurized the Dutch for passes through their officials and put obstacles in the way of Dutch trade until passes were given. The Sultan of Golconda was jealous in preserving the freedom of the roads of the port of Masulipatnam. He forbade Europeans from bringing their rivalries into his waters. On one occasion, when the Dutch seized a Portuguese ship on the Masulipatnam roads, he surrounded the Dutch factory and forced them to free the captives. He could not force them to surrender the ship but was paid off by the Dutch to keep it. The Sultan's officers did not hesitate to act against the assets of the Dutch on land to secure redress, as was demonstrated by the seizure of the chief of the factory Van Uffelen, who then died in captivity.

The Mughal state was troubled by European hostility again in the 1680s and 1690s, when it had to act to defend its maritime interests and its freedom of trade. A number of disputes over customs and trade in Bengal led the English to declare war on the Mughals. Their navy blockaded Surat and seized a number of ships, attacking some Mughal forts on the Gangetic delta. The crisis of the 1690s was more serious in that it was caused by European pirates and therefore was not the responsibility of the Companies. A number of pirate vessels, fitted in North America and the Caribean Islands, made their way to the Arabian Sea in the hope of

easy pickings from unarmed but richly laden Indian vessels. The most notorious of these was Captain Avery who, with his ship *Fanny*, roamed these waters and captured several Surat ships, including those belonging to the imperial family. His prize capture was the Mughal ship *Ganj-i-Sawar*, reputedly with Rs 52 lakhs on board.

The Mughals were helpless against these pirates. They could not proceed against them on land, as they did against the Companies. They therefore adopted the only strategy open to them, which was to hold the Companies responsible and thrust the onus of ridding the pirates on them. They were helped in this by the fact that some of the pirates were of British nationality and flew British colours. Mughal officials were ordered to put pressure on the Companies, if need be by force, against their assets on land, to escort Mughal vessels and take responsibility for losses due to piracy. The Companies resisted this as much as they could but found that they had to eradicate piracy if they were to continue to trade in Mughal territory. The three Companies were forced to sign a memorandum taking responsibility for the safety of shipping in various sectors of the Ocean. The English fitted out ships to seize pirate vessels, especially Captain Avery and his *Fanny*. He escaped to the Bahamas.

The Mughal empire, as the most powerful political entity with control over resources much desired by Europeans, was able to dictate terms on which it opened its doors to foreign commerce. With abiding commercial interests of its own, it was quick to respond to any threats to these interests and utilize its enormous power within the land for this purpose. It was therefore remarkably successful in keeping trade free and open throughout the century, and it did not allow any group or body to turn the terms of trade unfavourable to its own interests. The same may be said, though to a lesser degree, about the two other major powers of the Deccan, Golconda and Bijapur. Golconda in particular succeeded in keeping open the trade of Masulipatnam, despite occasional threats. It contained the growth of Madras to a position where it could attract to that port the trade of the region. Bijapur, with less overt and direct interests in trade, nonetheless pursued policies in the same

direction and kept trade, both on its east coast and on its west, free and open throughout its existence. In both cases the concept of freedom of trade has to be qualified, as will be discussed below. Both states were vulnerable to European naval blockade but neither hesitated in using their strength on land when necessary, as seen by the Bijapur attack on Wingurla in 1653, and several attacks on the Dutch and English residences in Masulipatnam.

The Marathas under Shivaji developed a maritime policy to go hand in hand with their territorial aggrandisement in Maharashtra. Shivaji appears to have appreciated, early on, the importance of dominating the coastal lands and waters. He therefore put a great deal of energy into the building up of a navy, utilizing the abundant resources of the Konkan and Maharashtra coasts. His conquest of the ports of Kalyan, Bhivandi and Panvel from Bijapur made the Marathas a formidable coastal power. He began to challenge Portuguese strongholds in the neighbourhood. He attacked the ports of Rajapur and Dabhol, and Basrur to the south. He carried his military strategy of establishing forts and central seats of power to the coasts, building a number of forts along the coast and on offshore islands. This active naval policy brought him into conflict with the English, whom he was not afraid to take on in coastal waters. There were running battles between his navy and that of the Siddis of Janjira, who were the Mughal naval arm. There is some fragmentary evidence of the commercial activities generated by this interest and increased power on the coast. From his ports, Shivaji appears to have participated in the trade westwards to Mokha, Aden, Muskat and Basra. There was no strong indigenous Maratha tradition of sea-borne commerce. The Marathas must have utilized the merchant connection of the coast—Konkan, Bijapur and Gujarat—to carry on trade under their protection. This active state interest in maritime affairs appears as an uncommon and somewhat strange phenomenon. It was possible for Shivaji to do so as a rising leader, without too much commitment on land and as a necessary safeguard of territory close to his home base. Under his successors, as inland military commitments increased, the coast and the sea faded away as a prime concern of Maratha polity.

The situation was different with the smaller powers of the far

south and the Malabar coast. The trading states of the Malabar coast had a very stressful time over this century. Their political acumen, diplomatic skills and commercial strategies of survival were tested to the limit. The second half of the century proved even more stressful than the first. The Dutch were harder taskmasters and enforced rigorous contracts on them. Internal differences among the states and their propensity to use European power against their rivals made them even more vulnerable from the point of view of free commerce. Among the Malabar states, Calicut as the largest and most powerful, with a history of involvement in international trade, continued to be busy, attempting to create a space for itself to trade freely overseas. It was being crowded out, as were the other states, by the Dutch. Nevertheless, it continued to draw every bit out of the system, trading both in the name of the Zamorin himself and through allied state and merchant groups. It used with particular skill the opportunity provided by European competition in Malabar in the last quarter of the century, flirting at different times with the English, Danes and French. It also attempted to trade under Dutch protection, taking advantage of the considerable leverage it had with them. The Zamorin played a cat-and-mouse game with the Dutch in this period, the aim of which was to maintain the trade of Calicut in the age of Dutch dominance. The Zamorin's great one-time ally in this, Ali Raja of Cannanore, was greatly weakened in the second half of the seventeenth century. His political base had been largely destroyed after the joint Portuguese–Calicut attack in 1600, and he was not allowed by the Dutch to rebuild this base. His settlement was beneath the guns of the Dutch fort of Cannanore which he tried repeatedly to storm without success. Ali Raja was searching for a territorial base outside Dutch control in north Malabar but his efforts were not successful. The gradual dissolution of this trading state of Mapillas is partly responsible for the rise of piracy in Malabar from mid-century onwards. The southern Malabar states, with their rich pepper hinterland, wanted desperately to break out of Dutch control and defy the contracts forced on them. They could not do this by direct confrontation, having neither the requisite military nor naval power, but adopted various other devices. These rulers too took

advantage of European competition. The first English factories were established in these parts towards the end of the century. The rulers of Kayamkulam and Attingal quite openly defied Dutch contracts, trading with Indian and European merchants. The Dutch pepper monopoly was challenged more and more by them. It was to lead in the eighteenth century to the establishment of a counter-monopoly by the Raja of Travancore.

In the states of the far south also, a challenge to freedom of navigation was being faced in the second half of the century, again from the Dutch. The trade from the ports of Thanjavur, Madura and Ramnad was being subject to control by passes and restrictions on destination and commodities carried. It was affecting important trading links, and the states had to respond. The Nayak of Madura and the Raja of Ramnad responded more strongly than Thanjavur. This is partly explained by the influence that powerful trading communities had on the rulers in these two states. Both in Madura and Ramnad, the livelihood of pearl and chank divers, and of merchants trading in them, was affected by Dutch policies. Maraikkar merchants settled in Madura ports were influential both in the Madura court and even more so with the Ramnad Thevar's administration. Both states benefited from the pearl and chank trade as well as from the coastal trade of India and to Sri Lanka. Encouraged by the Maraikkar, both the rulers resisted Dutch efforts to settle on and dominate the coastline. Muslims helped them to keep trade routes open. This resulted in conflicts in the last two decades of the century in which the Dutch prevailed, but not without making some concessions to the two rulers for limited free trade.

The above discussion and the mass of data assembled in the discussion of trade in the various regions, point inescapably to the conclusion that, in the Indian subcontinent, commerce was looked upon as an area of activity intricately linked to the states' concerns. Just as rulers were conscious of the need to protect and, where possible, expand the boundaries of the state, they were alive to the prosecution of commerce, inland and overseas, in their domains. It was also asserted, with a number of examples, that states were conscious of the need to preserve freedom of navigation. In any

discussion of the relationship between state and commerce it is necessary to explore whether there was a concept of separation of spheres of activity, and what freedom of commerce meant if the state itself was an active participant in that commerce. In the literature of pre-modern commerce, various forms of directed or administered trade have been identified in various societies. In the Mughal empire, there is the separation of the spheres of commerce: *sauda-i-am* and *sauda-i-khas*. *Sauda-i-am* was the general open trading sector where everyone was free to participate. *Sauda-i-khas* was the restricted trading sphere which the state, now and then, chose to keep to itself. It goes without saying that the expansion of the restricted trading sphere would adversely affect general trade. It is important to determine, therefore, the extent of restriction to general trade in the Mughal empire, and indeed in the other Indian states of this period, to determine the effectiveness of free trade operating at that time.

There were various extreme forms of administered trade operating in the trading world of Asia at that time. Scholars who have written about the trade of South East Asian port-states have contended that rulers held extensive monopolies and carried on trade directly themselves. They used primarily foreign traders as carriers of their goods and were both sole buyers and sellers in the ports. Some of these rights they would concede to their nobles to keep them as clients and to purchase their support. If this was the case, it must have been a development of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for the commercial system of the sultanate of Melaka was not one of administered trade. In the seventeenth century, in the sultanate of Acheh, and in the kingdoms of Ayuthya, Arakan and Pegu, there is evidence of some form of state control and direction of overseas trade. In Ayuthya, for example, commerce was a department of state. Influential foreign merchants were appointed to it to manage the state monopolies. The state declared a monopoly in the lucrative items of trade, such as tin and deer hides. In Arakan, the major export commodity, rice, had to be purchased from royal stores. In the western Indian Ocean, the major example of administered trade was the Safavid empire in Persia. Shah Abbas, the founder, transferred all the trade to the mainland port of Bandar

Abbas and strictly administered a monopoly in silk. Under his successors the monopoly was relaxed, but the state remained a major trader.

The situation in Indian states appears to be different in many respects from the examples of administered trade cited above. While the Mughals, now and then, asserted prescriptive rights over certain sectors of trade, these were sporadic and never at any time embraced overwhelming parts of the whole trade. There are numerous examples of restrictive regulations being issued. One purpose of such regulations was to give preference in producing centres to certain exporters favoured by the Mughals, or even to Mughal imperial trading interests. Thus in 1619 and again in 1632 the Gujarat administration proclaimed orders prohibiting the English and Dutch from buying cloth in Broach and Baroda, to ensure that Indian merchants had enough for export and to ensure domestic supplies. In 1641 this happened in Ahmedabad, where the emperor was buying textiles for export and the Dutch were banned from procuring any. Such restrictions were temporary and soon removed. Later in the century, similar action was taken in Bengal by the subahdar to protect his exports. It happened on several occasions in Golconda, when exporters felt the pressure of European demand. Mir Jumlah used to demarcate entire weaving villages for his exclusive use while he was making ready voyages to eastern and western markets. As in the Mughal case, these were temporary injunctions intended to secure an immediate advantage for the ruler or someone acting on his behalf.

Another sphere in which the power of the state was used to commercial advantage was in the freight traffic from Surat to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. It was seen above that Mughal emperors and their families engaged in shipbuilding in the middle decades of the century with a view to prosecuting the freight traffic to West Asia. This was lucrative but was also becoming competitive, with many private merchants' ships, and with the ships of the two Companies also engaging in freight traffic to West Asia. In 1651, 1652 and 1654 orders were repeatedly issued by the Surat authorities prohibiting Dutch and English ships from loading the freight of Gujarat's merchants until royal ships were fully loaded.

In fact, if these ships were freely competing with European ships for freight traffic, they would have fared badly. Indian merchants, if they had the freedom, would have preferred to load their goods on European ships became of their reputation for safety. But the emperor had invested heavily in shipbuilding to tap the freight traffic and was not going to sit by to let this happen. It was only after the royal family withdrew from freight traffic in the 1660s that open competition was allowed and European Companies were able to pick up their share of this traffic. The Surat mutsuddi would sometimes use a little compulsion to make Europeans carry goods of his merchant favourites. The threat was that he would delay the loading of their ships, which would then lose their sailing schedule.

A more serious interference with trade was the attempt to set up monopolies, and for the state, through its officials, to appear as sole buyers or sole sellers of commodities. In the first years of Dutch trade in Golconda, coastal district officials, seeing the large export orders made by them for textiles, tried to emerge as sole suppliers of textiles. In 1611 the havaldar of Masulipatnam virtually compelled the Dutch to buy textiles from him. In 1613 his successor attempted to do the same with Peter Floris and entered into a contract with him for 5000 Pagodas of textiles. The Dutch soon freed themselves from this form of trading and secured the right to deal with merchants. Later in the 1640s, when Mir Jumlah emerged as a trading magnate, he too tried to become a major, if not the sole, supplier of textiles to the Dutch. The Mughals in Bengal and Gujarat did not attempt this in respect of textiles or silk but did try to create monopolies in indigo.

Seeing an expanded demand in indigo both for the European trade as well as the trade in West Asia, the state attempted to operate a monopoly in the sale of indigo in Gujarat and north-western India. In 1633, on imperial orders all merchants were shut out of the indigo trade which became a state monopoly. The right to buy and sell indigo was then sold to a Gujarati Banya. The emperor was reported to have received Rs 400,000 for this monopoly. The monopolist buyer was able to depress purchasing price with the producers and push up substantially the sale price to exporters. The monopolist demanded higher prices from the Dutch and English,

who decided to resist this by combined action. They agreed not to purchase indigo at this price. Their not coming to the market for two successive years defeated the purpose of the monopoly, which was abandoned in 1636 and trade resumed in the previous mode.

A rather more extreme attempt at directed trade was made in Golconda in the years 1619–20. The Sar-i-Khail, who was the grantee of the revenues of Masulipatnam and neighbouring districts, thought he could maximize his returns by regulating the trade of that port. He and his sub-lessee, the havaldar, decided that the increasing Dutch investment and import in Golconda could be a good target for their schemes. The havaldar emerged as a buyer of spices which the Dutch imported and which could be sold or re-exported at profit. He discouraged other merchants from approaching the Dutch factory and applied pressure on the Dutch to sell all the imports to him at prices which were about 5 per cent to 12 per cent less than the market price. He then resold the goods to the merchants at a good profit. Among measures used to shut out other merchants was the posting of guards on the approaches to the Dutch factory to keep them out, as well as denying licences to merchants to transport these goods inland. Payments for these goods were delayed, but this seems to have been accepted practice. A further step in this directed trade was taken when the havaldar decided to auction the right to trade with the Dutch to the highest bidder. A consortium of three Komatty merchants—Linganna, Ramanna and Condor—was sold the right for a sum of 6000 Pagodas. During this period, no other merchant of Golconda could deal with the Dutch in their import trade. The Dutch were very disadvantaged and decided to take drastic steps to remedy the situation. They withdrew from the port in 1629 and blockaded its trade. The sultan realized that his officials had gone too far, dismissed the havaldar and granted the Dutch a farman assuring them the freedom to trade with any merchant of their choice.

Sometimes states would attempt to establish a monopoly in the purchase of bullion. The Golconda state tried this once, again on attempting to farm out the trading rights to the highest bidder. But efforts to control the bullion market did not last long as states realized the inherent danger of restricting the flow of bullion. In

the 1640s Krishnappa, commander-in-chief of the Nayak of Gingee, tried to emerge as a monopolist buyer of imports in the ports of Devanampatnam, Pondicherry and Porto Novo. In the State of Ikkeri the Nayaks, in an attempt to consolidate their power, became major sellers of rice and pepper, the two major exports of the state. They authorized a few court merchants who would then negotiate with exporters on their behalf. The usual result of this was to push up prices, which then became counter-productive for it drove buyers from the market.

There is evidence from Bengal of attempts at the creation of monopolies by provincial government officials. When Prince Azim-us-Shan was head of that province, he engaged in pre-emptive buying of imported goods, which he resold to merchants. He had his agents at every port to have first claim on the ship's cargo on behalf of their master. When Mir Jumlah transferred to Bengal, he carried with him his monopolistic practices. He tried to become sole supplier of saltpetre to the English. Shaista Khan, Subahdar of Bengal, was another officer who created monopolies in specific commodities. He tried to monopolize the sale of salt, bee's wax and the purchase of gold. Faujdars of Hughli and sometimes Balesore would exercise rights to have first claim on the imports of the Companies, which they would then re-sell to merchants at a profit. This was like the practice adopted in Masulipatnam. When officials exercised this to any extensive degree, it depressed trade and gave rise to protests by the Companies.

In Malabar, state administrated trade took place of a type rather similar to what took place in South East Asia. The similarity of the two political and commercial systems made this possible. The territorial area was small, the main trade item was one commodity, and it grew in a confined area where the ruler could secure most of the product. In this situation the ruler of the state contracted with overseas merchants to sell them a certain quantity of pepper at agreed prices. The Zamorin of Calïcut, the Ommetry, Ali Raja, rulers of Kayamkulam, Quilon and Attingal traded in this way. Such contracts were made with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the Danes, the French, and with Surat merchants. It appears that the rulers used the services of local merchants to

assemble the pepper from widely scattered producing villages. In the loading port the ruler would have large storage facilities and officials—generally merchants—to transact business with foreign merchants. For example, the ruler of Kayamkulam in the 1680s employed the powerful Kanarese merchant Babha Prabhu as his chief accountant and manager of commerce. As noted above, he was defying his monopoly contract with the Dutch and developing his state as a free trading area for pepper and other products. States like the Zamorin's Calicut, which did not grow abundant pepper but nonetheless was a major exporter, utilized their power and influence in the region over petty princelings to attract pepper from those parts. These states encouraged the inland transport of pepper through their connections with local lords to beat the Dutch blockade. The Zamorin's commercial operations were also largely run by merchants of the region. Influential merchants such as Perambalam, Nana Prabhu and his brother Babha Prabhu, Santapa Kuny, and the Surat merchant Virji Vohra, did a lot of the commercial business of the state under the shrewd supervision of the Zamorin. This was a model which the rulers of Travancore were to follow later.

Was state intervention, particularly state and officials' participation in trade, a disincentive to trade in that state, and how were merchants affected by such policies? This is an important issue in assessing seventeenth century Indian commerce but made difficult by the nature of the evidence. Almost all the evidence of this aspect of trade comes to us from the European Companies and this is generally condemnatory of such policies. Their injunction to their local servants was to avoid dealing with state officials if possible. Company administrations, quick to impose monopolies in places ruled by them, were vociferous in the demand for free trade in other states. Official participation and interest in commerce could be a two-edged sword. Positively, it brought about numerous benefits to commerce implicit in the discussion above. It brought capital into commerce, enlarged shipping capacity, provided protection when necessary, and generally promoted a climate favourable to commerce. It gave merchants a degree of access to political in-

fluence, to persuade the political rulers to act in the interests of commerce.

On the negative side, there were some obvious disadvantages. The creation of monopolies, and the policy of pre-emptive buying and forced sales disturbed the market and disturbed trade. It caused major price fluctuations in certain commodities. It also led to scarcities and disturbed production, such as in indigo cultivation in and around Ahmedabad in the 1630s. There is some indirect evidence that the widespread monopolistic practices of the officials in the region around Masulipatnam led to a trade depression in the area. Likewise, there were downturns in trade in Bengal at times, attributable to the enthusiastic pursuit of monopoly trade by officials. The attempt to engross the rice trade in Kanara in the hands of a few court favourites led to great increases in prices and almost lost for Kanara its advantage in rice trade. There is a view that Mir Jumlah's dominance of the trade of Masulipatnam affected his competitors so adversely that it led to their long-term decline in that port. This seems to exaggerate Mir Jumlah's influence on contemporary trade. The sudden withdrawal of the Mughal emperors from shipping and direct trade may well have been the result of representations by Gujarati merchants. In all the cases of state and official interference with trade, it is clear that no long-term damage to commerce resulted. Merchants either learnt to operate within the system or lasted it out in the hope that the norm would prevail. It should be made clear that the norm was freedom of the marketplace and an orderly transaction of competitive trade. Artificial interruptions were few and far between.

There is further the issue of an extortionate state that squeezed merchants at every turn. Again, this is a picture that has been made popular from European evidence—largely the accounts of individual travellers who happened to pass through Mughal territory, not so much of the factory servants of the Companies (though the latter sometimes indulged in sweeping assertions of this type). As seen above, commerce was taxed far less than agriculture in the India of this time. There was a discriminatory personal tax on Hindus that they had learnt to live with. There were other cesses

and imposts for specific purposes, such as defence of a port. Cases of extortion are highlighted where a military grantee of revenues of a commercial district seeks to maximize these revenues by extorting something extra from merchants. This may well have happened. The only specific case mentioned by European records is the extortion of Masulipatnam Hindu merchants by the *sar-i-khail* and his havaldar in the 1620s. European evidence makes much of the fact that Indian merchants were reluctant to reveal their assets for fear of extortion by officials. The point is also made about escheat of a deceased merchant's property to the Mughal state. There is no evidence that this was widespread practice. Hindu and Islamic laws of inheritance were well in place throughout the country and succession was regulated by these laws. The state or judicial authorities would step in only in cases of dispute.

Indian states and rulers in the seventeenth century were very receptive to European settlement for commerce in their domains, though the experience of the preceding century with the Portuguese had been traumatic. They were influenced both by direct commercial consideration of the advantages each would bring, and also by diplomatic considerations of balancing one against the other. Indian states became adept at this latter game and learnt to effectively use European rivalry to maintain freedom of commerce. The Mughal empire and many other coastal states permitted the establishment of factories on the coast and a few in the interior. They were strictly controlled as to size and the nature of construction work permitted. As regards fiscal privilege, decisions were taken ad hoc. For example, the English received more favourable terms from the Mughals than the Dutch because of the good impression created by Roe's embassy. Generally, Europeans were permitted to make a commuted payment of customs duties. This was advantageous both to the Indian state and, more particularly, to the Europeans in the context of their ever-expanding trade. Freedom from inland duties was also generally given to encourage the import trade. States were scrupulous in seeing that Europeans did not gradually expand their privileges. This was particularly observed in judicial matters to avoid the creation of an *imperium in imperio*. Europeans were not allowed to punish or otherwise ill-treat Indians, and any differences between

Europeans and Indians had to be referred to the Indian authority. The Mughals had sufficient power and prestige to always have the upper hand, but in some of the smaller states Europeans could and did intrude into local society. When state administration was weak or preoccupied, Europeans were able to break out of their enclaves and exercise more freedom. This happened to the English in the Godavari delta in the 1670s, when they developed a settlement in Madapollam, owned large houses, and controlled a number of service personnel.

The major cause of conflict between Europeans and Indian state administrations in this period was taxation and exemption from taxation. Most Europeans secured tax concessions along with their farmans of settlement. One of their concessions was the exemption from inland duties on goods bought by them for export or sold by them to be transported to inland markets. It was one thing for the central government to grant these concessions, it was quite another for them to be followed by the tax collecting authorities in the localities. Inland taxes were collected by a multiplicity of grantees, and by those who had farmed the taxes from them. Unless deductions were made from the gross amount due for the amount of the exemptions, they insisted on collecting what they had purchased. Thus, they would tax goods coming from weaving villages in the interior for the Companies as well as goods bought from the Companies and transported to inland markets. European concessionaries were denied the benefit of the exemptions. This was a perennial cause of conflict and complaints. The Companies would repeatedly take these complaints up with the central administration and have the concession reconfirmed. When the exemptions were followed, they were an attractive concession to Europeans. Indian states gave these concessions in the expectation that the encouragement of export would lead to increased economic activity in the interior, from which the state would benefit in the long term. It would also encourage import and make such goods more available.

Indian states permitted a certain degree of freedom in the littoral but were alert to see that this freedom was not abused. Europeans were granted privileges and permitted several settlements in a state, but were constantly warned against further penetration. Stronger

states like the Mughal empire and Golconda were more successful in doing this. During this period Europeans did not seek to impose themselves on, or change, the littoral and the coast. The hostility to the existence of a culturally alien enclave was seen when the Sultan of Golconda moved against the Portuguese in San Thome in 1664. The Mughals would have dearly loved to get rid of the Portuguese in Goa if they could. Two cases of the growth of independent European enclaves are special and need to be mentioned. The English were enticed by a petty ruler, the Nayak of Venkatagiri, at the twilight of his independent existence, to settle and develop a tiny fishing village which grew into the port of Madras. The Nayak gave the English concessions which were unusually liberal in contemporary terms: total customs freedom, the right to fortify the place, minting, and extraterritorial rights. It happened at a time when, in the hinterland, no strong state had succeeded to the collapsed Vijayanagar empire. The English took advantage of this situation to develop the settlement and port under their autonomous administration. When Golconda asserted its authority over the hinterland of Madras and attempted to renegotiate the terms of the grant, it was too late. The English were well entrenched and decided to resist with force. Golconda abandoned the attempt. The other case was that of Pondicherry, where the Bijapur ruler deliberately invited the French to settle in a port on this territory with a series of concessions. Pondicherry then developed with some autonomy, though not as much as enjoyed by the English at Madras.

Europeans generally learnt to live with the system as it operated in the states with which they were trading. Reading the records of Company officials, one may get the impression that the Companies and Indian states were perenially in conflict. This was far from being the case. Company and state officials in every trade locality worked out the problems as they arose. Europeans learnt to use the apparatus of conflict resolution then prevailing: *peshcash*, *nazar*, appeal to a patron, an influential intermediary and the ultimate embassy to the ruler himself. The naval blockade was always a weapon that lay hidden in the background, to be brought out in extremity. The states could counter this by moving against

European assets and persons, stopping their trade. It was then a war of attrition to see who made the first move to compromise. Often there were people in the middle who worked to bring the two sides together. These were people who stood to lose the most by this stand-off.

No Indian state during this period, with the exception of the Malabar states, could give its undivided attention to the littoral. State capitals were well located into the interior and states had preoccupations in various parts of their inland domains. It was noted above that states did not keep any substantial armed force in a port or in the littoral. Hence it was that Europeans sometimes acted with audacity in ports and on the coast. The Dutch attack and temporary seizure of Masulipatnam (1687) and the English attack on Hughli and Chittagong (1688) are examples of this. Both attacks had the element of surprise and were initially successful. It could be said that, while Indian states were realizing benefits from overseas trade and from the movement of goods from coast to interior, they had not realized the corresponding importance of keeping these avenues open and of safeguarding the places from which these transactions originated. When the Mughals moved southwards into the Deccan, this landward preoccupation was further intensified as the Maratha challenge was primarily an inland challenge. Though the Mughals acquired substantial valuable coastline both to the east and west with the conquest of Golconda and Bijapur, the significance of this acquisition did not seep into Mughal political thinking, which continued to be oriented to the Indo-Gangetic plains. It was a coastline, especially on the east, where the Europeans were commercially well entrenched.

9

Shipping and Seafaring

In spite of relative abundance of evidence on commerce, movement of commodities, merchants and their relationships with states in maritime India in the seventeenth century, hard data on the nature of shipping, shipbuilding, seafaring and what went on in ships is hard to come by. The historiography on these aspects has been built around the flimsy and random descriptions that have come down from that period, as well as the period immediately preceding and after. Some of the writers take a long-term view and look at the subject in the context of developments over half a millenium from around the thirteenth century. Others extrapolate from late nineteenth and twentieth century evidence, and still others—this is a recent development—use archaeology and anthropology to study present-day survivals of traditional crafts and the techniques of maritime people. Interestingly enough, there seems to be a larger body of evidence coming down to us from the sixteenth century than there is from the seventeenth. This may well be because the Portuguese, as the first Europeans to come to Asia by the oceanic route, were taken up by strikingly distinct technologies and traditions of shipping and seafaring, and faithfully recorded these features.

The interest in what were seen as quaint and archaic forms of shipbuilding and sailing technology spilt over into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as part of the broader interest in the exotic and unchanging east. In India, British administrators, military and naval personnel, ethnologists and antiquarians were struck by the surviving techniques of the sailing craft of the Indian Ocean. Similar interest was evinced in a more divergent and pervasive maritime tradition in South East Asia by Dutch, British and French observers. These scholars, both amateur and professional, utilized both their observations of the contemporary scene and the extant travel literature of preceding centuries to classify types of ships and sailing

traditions across the Indian Ocean. As we move into the twentieth century, these accounts are better informed by critical and scientific methods of investigation. Archaeology, anthropology, folklore and examination of archival material began to produce more accurate studies of the state of pre-modern shipping and seafaring.

In the seventeenth century, despite the more intense and diverse presence of European navigators in the Asian waters, there is no corresponding increase in the evidence available on Asian shipping and seafaring. There is of course reference to the abundance of Asian sailing craft from the various regions plying the ocean, but even the extent of curiosity displayed by Portuguese writers of the preceding century on the nature and characteristics of this shipping is not present. The Dutch, who appear to have spent more time than other Europeans in recording Asian shipping movements, do not go beyond the superficial facts of these ships. The English had far fewer personnel and were less spread out in Asia than the Dutch, recording only the skimpiest details of Asian shipping. The terminology used by these Europeans only adds to the confusion. Both the English and the Dutch had acquired from the Portuguese their terminology to describe Asian craft. The Portuguese used European terminology to describe Asian craft that, in their eyes, distantly corresponded to the ships with which they were familiar. Thus, Dutch shipping lists would use a variety of terms to describe Asian ships that called at particular ports, terms which were a mix of recognizable Asian names and obviously European ones. Thus, they would describe ships as fusts, yachts, sloops, brigs, galliots, frigates and phars. On the other hand, there was a greater use of Asian dockyards by the Europeans and this generated some evidence on their location as well as the methods used in Asian shipbuilding.

Historians of Portuguese Asia have established beyond doubt the extent to which the Portuguese relied on Asian shipbuilding to supplement their shipping capacity in Asia. They did this not by creating new centres of shipbuilding but by taking over established centres by conquest and using others by mutual agreement with Asian powers. Much of this was centred on the Indian subcontinent, particularly on its western coast. Cochin, Goa, Bassein and Daman, which had already been established centres, were continued after

their conquest with intensified activity. In the early sixteenth century there was intense shipbuilding activity for the Portuguese in Cochin. Goa was an excellent situation for shipbuilding, both on account of its deep-water estuaries and its access to suitable timber. Bassein had dense teak forests in its immediate hinterland, excellent for building ships. Apart from these places annexed by the Portuguese, they also utilized the dockyards in Gujarat and Kathiawar for building a variety of boats and ships of varying sizes.

As a result of this, there had begun a process of gradual integration between western designs and indigenous styles. The Portuguese dockyards produced vessels of both types: the biggest vessels such as the carracks, galleasses, galleons and barks, small craft such as frigates, pinnaces, sloops and fusts for coastal and patrol work, and purely indigenous boats and ships from small to medium to large size. This enabled Indian shipwrights to study European designs and incorporate some of their features into their own techniques. Perhaps the most significant influence was the arming of the ships and the strengthening of their hulls to incorporate several pieces of cannon in their structure. This was a long drawn-out process and appears to have begun immediately after the first contacts with the Portuguese in Malabar. Ships of the Malabar coast, particularly those made and sailed by the Mapillas in Cannanore, were well armed and took part in stand-up battles with Portuguese carracks. But it took time for Indian-built vessels to structurally adapt themselves to incorporate layers of cannons in their hulls. The Asian merchant vessel, by the very nature of its ownership and functions, could not transform itself into a part warship part cargo vessel, as many of the European ships of this period were doing.

However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, merchant vessels were almost routinely armed, if only lightly. Gradually the ships were being transformed in their construction to strengthen their armed capabilities. The vessels of Gujarat which the English interrupted at the entrance to the Red Sea were lightly armed. John Saris speaks of a meeting in 1612 with two Indian ships in Mokha: 'We saluted them with nine Pieces of ordnance; they answered back with three Chambers a Piece, being all they had.' As the fleets of ports such as Surat and Dabhol increased, and the size of the average

merchant ship, those ships began to be better armed. There was great reliance on European technology in this. Prominent merchants and rulers and governors who owned ships would press the Europeans to provide gunners. Thus, many Portuguese, English, Dutch and Danes served as gunners on Indian ships and gradually passed on the technology to their Indian subordinates. Sometimes there were mishaps, such as in 1638, when a large merchant vessel belonging to the Masulipatnam merchant Mir Kamaluddin fired a volley in salute to its sister ship as it was passing in the Straits of Hormuz. The cannon misfired, the gunpowder exploded, the ship caught fire and was wrecked, with the loss of crew and passengers totalling about 500 people.

In the second half of the century, Indian ships were routinely armed with ten to twenty pieces of cannon. But even in the end of the century the arming of these ships had not been achieved to an extent which made them effectively defensible against attack. Das Gupta, on the basis of Dutch evidence, notes that the large merchant ships of Gujarat, though armed with cannon, did not have these properly laid down so as to provide sufficient room for their operation in emergencies. Indian merchants would not sacrifice cargo space to provide room for ammunition which could be moved around, nor room for guns to be worked on with convenience. The immense and expensive ship *Ganj-i-Sawar* was taken by the English pirate, Avery, without a shot being fired. The situation improved in the eighteenth century, however, and Asian vessels are then reported as carrying forty to fifty cannon, like their European counterparts in Asian waters.

The absence of hard evidence on the shape, structure and craftsmanship that went into shipbuilding has made it difficult for historians to classify the types of ships that sailed the Indian Ocean. A number of attempts have been made with a great deal of disagreement among them. Currently, the most acceptable seems to be the classification of a broad Indo-Arab type that was prevalent from the East African and West Asian shores to western India, and some would say that it extended as far as Bengal. The parent of this Indo-Arab type was the Arab *dhow*, but in the seventeenth century this original had been subject to much regional modification in the

shape of the hull, stern and prow, and in the riggings. A main characteristic of this type of ship appears to have been that it was shell-built, with planks carved into shape and fitted together, and the hull was subsequently strengthened by being fitted with ribs made out of wood of suitable shape, selected from the branches of trees. The edges of the planks were then filled with a mixture prepared from resin, lime and beaten hemp. The planks were stitched together with coir made out of coconut fibre. The planks were also coated on the outside with lime, beaten vegetable fibre and fish oil to protect them from the destructive effects of sea water.

This stitched or sewn character of most of the shipping, as opposed to the use of iron nails to fasten planks, was prominently noted up to the early sixteenth century, sometimes derogatorily. The extent of the use of iron in shipbuilding and the influences that resulted in this is the subject of controversy among historians. Some would assert that this was one of the prominent influences of the arrival of the Atlantic ship into the Indian Ocean. Others point to the use of iron in Chinese junks and some South East Asian craft, long before European influence, and speculate that it may have come to the Indian Ocean from the east. Whatever the case may be, by the end of the sixteenth century ships were being built using iron, and in the seventeenth century there is reason to believe that this was routinely the case in west and east Indian dockyards.

The fastening of planks one to another was done by a method that was peculiar to Indian, especially west Indian, shipbuilding carpenters. This was the method of rabbetting, i.e. cutting a groove into the edge of one plank which then received another plank, appropriately shaped. Wooden tree nails were used to hold these planks to one another and to the sides. It appears that Indian shipwrights preferred this technique and continued to use it in the seventeenth century. Ships built in Europe in this period were generally frame-built, with planks of the hull nailed on each other and to the frame. The space between planks was caulked with oakum, a mixture of beaten fibre and pitch. It appears that English naval people in the east preferred the Indian method of rabetting and were quite comfortable with it. When the English began to

establish shipbuilding in Bombay, they employed Indian carpenters and adopted their methods in preference to their own. It was both effective and much cheaper than the method of caulking. That Indians, when faced with a choice, chose their own method is seen in the case of a transaction for the sale of an English ship to a Gujarat official. He refused to proceed with the transaction when he realized that the ship for sale was caulked and sealed with oakum.

This Indo-Arab type of ship was built in many of the dockyards of western India, from Malabar to Kathiawar, but historians differ on the extent to which it spread to eastern India where there was a variety of indigenous traditions. The ships of Bengal appear to have been partly of this type. Ships of the Indo-Arab type took a variety of forms, depending on where they were built, and they were also being modified under European influence. The necessity to carry cannon, as noted above, meant that the hull had to be considerably strengthened. In the shape of the ships, observers noted the influence of European styles. While in the pre-Portuguese period the dhows were double-ended at stem and stern, later the shape of the stern was changed and an aft-castle built, in imitation of the galleon. Pilgrim ships had to be modified to take many passengers, with cabins installed in multiple decks. For the comfort of important passengers, male and female, there had to be a few well-appointed cabins.

A second type of vessel noted by contemporary observers is referred to by them as junks. There seems to have been a variety of shipping in operation that could be said to be broadly of the Chinese/South East Asia type. From accounts of the seventeenth century these do not seem to have been the typical Chinese junks of East Asia. The Chinese junks were large, sturdily built ships, using a lot of iron nails with square multiple sails of matting flattened by bamboo strips. The stern was high and the bow projected into the sea. The hull was partitioned by solid bulkheads which ran both lengthwise and across the breadth of the ship. It does not appear as if the shipbuilders of India took over the construction of such ships, though its characteristics, such as the partitioning, seem to have been adapted to Indian designs. A few ships plying out of India, especially the east coast, are referred to

by European observers as junks, but it is not known if they used it to mean the Chinese type of junk. The derivation of the term 'junk' has been attributed by some historians to the Malay word 'jung', meaning a type of large ocean-going, big-sized cargo vessel that was common in South East Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is possible that this South East Asian 'jung' evolved from the Chinese junk and then made its way into eastern Indian shipbuilding, through the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal where it must have been constructed in the Burmese and Malay shipbuilding centres. The extensive use of iron, the compartmentalization and the rigging may have been adopted in some form or the other in these ships of Bengal and Coromandel.

There is some linguistic evidence on the possible spread of South East Asian ship types into eastern India. The word 'prahu' seems to have been used to describe some of the small sailing craft of the east coast. Likewise, some of the ships are referred to as 'sampans'. These are both Malay terms for different kinds of vessels of the archipelago. It is possible that some of these styles were adopted by eastern Indian shipbuilders and incorporated into their traditional craft methods.

Right from the first contact of European navigators with Indian shipping, there was unanimous admiration for the strength of the timber that went into the construction of Indian ships. In the major shipbuilding centres of Malabar, Konkan, Gujarat, Coromandel and Bengal, teak was widely used for the hull. Teak was an exceptionally hard wood that contributed to the longevity of Indian ships. The oak-built European ships of this period had a life of about ten to twelve years. As contrasted to this, teak-built ships lasted much longer—about fifty to eighty years. For this reason, right from the outset the Portuguese started getting their large ships made in Malabar out of teak and, in the seventeenth century, the English and Dutch also had several ships made in Gujarat and Coromandel out of teak. The other important shipbuilding centre with easy access to teak wood was Burma, where in Pegu and Syriam Indians as well as the English had ships constructed. Another factor contributing to the longevity of Indian ships was the practice of sheathing, widely practised in the dockyards. Because of the nature of

their construction, these ships could have damaged planks easily replaced with new planks. European observers commented on this practice, too, as contributing to the longevity and therefore economy of Indian vessels over European.

The extent to which Indian ship designs changed under European influence is difficult to determine. There is no doubt that Indian shipwrights were copying European designs in a number of dockyards. They were doing this partly under European direction, as well as at the demand of Indian shipowners. Northcote Parkinson, who studied ships plying the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth century, was of the view that European ships were no better than Indian, in fact that those built in Europe were a good deal worse. In his words: 'Had it merely been a question of English-built vessels taking the place of Indian vessels, the case would have been one of bad ships superseding good ships.' He says Indian carpenters copied European ships and built them according to their own methods. As a result, the copy was a great improvement on the original. So, what was happening from the end of the seventeenth century was a fusing of shipbuilding techniques, of the Indian Ocean with the Atlantic. He provides a plausible explanation of why, by the end of the seventeenth century, the shipbuilders of Surat were building ships that were made to look like European ships. This was an insurance against piracy on the high seas. In the eighteenth century, English ships were specifically imitated in western India.

While small boat-building enterprises were scattered throughout maritime India on the west and east coasts, there were a few major centres for the construction of the large ocean-going and coastal craft that were prominent in the seventeenth century. In Sind, in places up river of the Indus branches, there were shipbuilding establishments. Timber was available in the forests of the neighbouring hinterland, and ships as well as boats were constructed and floated downstream on ferries specially built for this purpose. In the seventeenth century there is no direct evidence of this continuing. Gujarat was one of the most important and prolific shipbuilding regions of India. The tradition of Gujarati shipbuilding has deep roots in the past and, in the sixteenth century, as trade expanded, old shipbuilding centres had large demands on them

while new centres arose along the coastal creeks. The southern Kathiawar peninsula and the Gulf of Cambay had a number of suitable estuaries with deep water suitable for such activity. Diu, Broach, Goga, and Cambay were shipbuilding centres. To the south of Cambay, Surat itself developed dockyards and an active programme of shipbuilding in the seventeenth century. Inside the Tapti river, and in places where its branches fell into it, were constructed dockyards. Here Indians, Persians, Arabs and others, as well as Europeans, had their ships built. At the mouth of the Tapti river there was Rander, and to the south were Navsari, Gandevi and Bulsar, all of which had shipbuilding facilities. All these centres were within easy access to timber forests in the hinterland, and the wood was floated down the rivers or brought in barges. The techniques of joining timber in a water-sealed manner or the rabetting referred to earlier seemed to have been developed in Gujarat. It was known in Gujarat as *vadhera*-joining. In these dockyards were turned out some of the largest vessels that sailed the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century.

Further to the South, the Konkani coast was an important area of shipbuilding, both small coastal craft and larger ships. There were shipbuilding facilities in Bassein, Kalyan, Bhivandi, Thana and Goa. Bassein and Thana had access to excellent teak forests and these places were on creek estuaries suitable for the building and launching of ships. The Portuguese in Goa, Bassein and Daman, when they held these places, developed upon existing Indian facilities for their purposes. With the rise of Maratha power along this coast, a spurt was given to shipbuilding by Shivaji and his successors. The Marathas realized the importance of a navy and developed centres for shipbuilding in Vijayadurga, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Kalyan, Bhivandi and Suvarnadurga. Maratha shipbuilding was not so much focussed on merchant vessels as on fast warships. Shivaji intended dominating coastal waters and combating the Mughals and the English with these. With this in mind, Maratha shipbuilding consciously imitated European war vessels. The emphasis was on equipping them with heavy guns and making them speedy. The Maratha Admiral Kanhoji Angre's fleet is said to have consisted of ten *gurabs* and fifty *gallivats*. Maratha policies towards

shipbuilding contributed to accelerating the trend towards imitating European styles in order to improve the fighting capacity of Indian ships.

The Kanara coast was another area with a strong tradition of shipbuilding. Honavar and Bhatkal had shipbuilding facilities, turning out primarily medium-sized craft which were used in the coastal trade of western India. The places were well situated on estuaries of rivers suitable for the launching of ships. They had access to good shipbuilding timber in hinterland forests. The region's rulers appear to have strongly supported shipbuilding, as did the merchants who dominated the ports. In Malabar there was the most pervasive shipbuilding tradition, continuing from the distant past and giving evidence of vitality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were a number of centres all along this coast, with good situations for constructing docks. These rivers and inland waterways facilitated the transport of heavy timber from the hinterland. The forests of the Western Ghats abounded in teak as well as other hard woods. Tall poon trees provided spars and masts which were in demand from all the Ocean's navigators. In Kolathaunad, to the north, all these conditions existed and places like Valarpatnam and Cannanore became shipbuilding centres. To the south, the Zamorin of Calicut encouraged the establishment of shipbuilding in his ports, especially in Calicut and Ponnani. Further to the south, Cochin had very suitable conditions and developed a shipbuilding industry which was nurtured by the Portuguese, and later by the Dutch. Apart from these major centres there were numerous other places where small craft were manufactured in large numbers.

The Malabaris had another subsidiary centre of shipbuilding in the islands of the Maldives and Lakhadives. Here Malabar Muslims had established settlements and dominated the resources. Old island boat-building traditions which had an affinity with South East Asia were developed upon to make vessels suitable for sailing in these waters. The islands abounded in coconut palm, and boats were constructed with planks made from this wood and sewn together with coir. The Mapillas, who dominated the Lakhadives, had small

galleys built here with pointed bows which they used in their running sea-battles with the Portuguese.

These Malabar galleys became famous in the coastal waters of the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were known by local names along the coast, as *galbet* and *gallivat*, and by the Maldivian name *gundra*. They must have been an early adaptation of old Malabar fast-sail and rowboats, such as the *kattiri*, to the militarization of the seas, introduced by the Portuguese. The major powers challenging the Portuguese and other Europeans, the Zamorin of Calicut and Ali Raja of Cannanore, had many of these turned out to provide a navy to protect their trade. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, when Mapilla political power had been crushed, they took to piracy on the seas in these warboats. Fleets of twenty to thirty of these fast galleys swarmed the Arabian Sea, pouncing on vulnerable ships, even attacking large well-armed European ships when conditions were to their advantage.

In the east coast of India, the central and south Coromandel coasts did not have suitable locations of necessary raw materials for the development of shipbuilding. There was some activity in boat-building along the Bay of Madura ports and in the Thanjavur ports of Nagapatnam and Karikal. It was only in the Godavari delta that we see the emergence of a shipbuilding centre in the seventeenth century. The river outlets of the delta provided suitable situations for the construction of dockyards. The hinterland was rich in teak forests which were accessible by water transport. Also available was iron from the foundries nearby, and coir from all over the coast. The major shipbuilding places on this coast were on the Vasishta Godavari river, about six miles from the estuary, in Narsapore and Madapollam. There were dockyards here for the construction of ships and for their repair. The English and Dutch established their own facilities for shipbuilding here, employing Indian carpenters, shipwrights and smiths under the supervision of master-craftsmen of their own nation. Ships were also constructed in a port to the north, Bimilipatnam, where also there was access to good timber. The presence of European craftsmen and the use by Europeans of these dockyards of north Coromandel would have resulted in the

transfer of technology in the designing and construction of ships to Indian craftsmen. There is some evidence of this in the attempts by Dutch smiths to improve the nails and bolts used in ships. The more common use of iron nails and iron anchors may have been the result of such influence.

In Orissa and Bengal there was an old shipbuilding tradition but there is no direct evidence of active shipbuilding in the seventeenth century. Balesore on the Burhabalang river was a shipbuilding centre where Bengal merchants had ocean-going vessels built. It had access to the hard woods of Orissa. In the Ganges delta riverine ports, the ancient shipbuilding traditions must have continued but there is no direct evidence of large active centres. The Hughli had a number of places where ships could be repaired, and along other tributaries old centres continued with some activity. Rajmahal, Jessore and Chittagong are other places where ships are reported as having been built: the last place, particularly, was provided with suitable timber. Most of the activity in Bengal seems to have been in the construction of river barges and coastal boats, of which there was a wide variety operating in our period. The Mughals, after their conquest of Bengal, encouraged shipbuilding, concentrating on armed river boats suitable for defence and for the transport of their armies. The necessity to defend the delta against Arakanese and Magh raids determined the type of boatbuilding. The boat used effectively by the Arakanese and other pirates was the *jalba*, which the Mughals also constructed with armed capacity. The Portuguese must have exerted a great deal of influence on Bengal shipbuilding, both by the demand they generated and by the effectiveness of their armed galliots. Portuguese shipwrights and gunners were used by Mughals and local rulers. There is evidence of an Englishman setting up a dockyard facility in Dacca for constructing ships for the demands of English freemerchants. This demand picked up in the last decades of the seventeenth century and must have led to more brisk activity.

Bengal shipbuilding would have been influenced by activity in Arakan and Pegu, where there was much more suitable teak in great abundance. It is likely that Bengal merchants had their large-sized ships built on the Burmese coast, as indeed did Coromandel mer-

chants. Perhaps with the influence of Chinese junk-type construction, sturdy and durable ships of large size were produced in Burma, Pegu, Martaban and Syriam. As the demand from English freemerchants for shipping increased, they developed the dockyards of Syriam to cater to their demands. The Company also saw the advantage of this. It brought down shipwrights and craftsmen to work with the Burmese in Syriam to produce ships to its stipulation.

The low cost of ships built in India as compared with Europe was well known, though exact figures are difficult to come by because of the confused nature of the data. From the data on the prices of ships in transactions entered into at Surat, Qaisar has estimated the cost of ships built there in a range of Rs 27 to Rs 40 a tonne. In comparison, a European ship worked out at about Rs 54 per tonne. The evidence on the transactions and building costs of ships generally does not provide the tonnage of the ships. The cost of a ship built in Narsapore for the Dutch in 1654 works out at Rs 45 a tonne. Around the same time, they bought a ship described as a yacht in Bimilipatnam for about Rs 6150, but its size is unclear. Another boat was bought at the same place for about Rs 11,500. Its size is given as 40 lasts (or 120 tonnes). Though the officials themselves admit the cost to be too high, at Rs 90 a tonne this report is incredible, for it is way above the prevailing cost of shipbuilding in this region. It was this low cost of shipbuilding that made the English invest in the construction of dockyards in Bombay, to which they attracted shipwrights and carpenters from Konkan and Gujarat. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century Bombay developed into a major centre, rivalling older centres to its north and south.

The size of these ocean-going vessels of India varied from the smallest of 80 to 100 tonnes to the largest of 1400 to 1600 tonnes. These large ships were the pilgrim ships of the latter part of the seventeenth century, generally owned by members of the Mughal imperial family. The bulk of the long-distance shipping tended to be of medium size, ranging from 200 tonnes to 800 tonnes. The Surat fleet tended to be, on average, larger than others, with Malabar ships generally on the lower end of the tonnage scale. In Coromandel there were a few large-size ships, mainly of Masulipatnam

owners; the others were of lower tonnage. In Bengal there were a few of the very large-sized ships on the long-distance voyages, and the others were of lower tonnage. The ships of South East Asian rulers which sailed into India tended to be of large size, generally over 500 tonnes. The Portuguese ships and the East Indiamen of the two Companies ranged from 400 to 800 tonnes. There is some evidence on the measurements of some Indian ships which were taken as prizes by the English near the Red Sea in 1612. The *Rahimi* was 153 feet in length from stem to stern, 42 feet broad at the top of her sides and 31 feet deep. The *Mahmudy* was 136 feet long, 41 feet broad and 29.5 feet deep. Compared with this an English East Indiaman was measured at 120 to 130 feet in length and about 30 feet in breadth. Later ships built for the Mughals in Surat were even larger than the *Rahimi.*

There are a few types of vessels that are referred to more frequently than others in the Europeans records as being sighted in India ports. The *ganj* and the *kathaya* are two common types of ship that sailed from Surat. They were probably of Arab origin but were soon adopted by Indians and built in their dockyards. The *gurab* is also often referred to as sailing from all parts of India, east and west. It was probably originally an Arab galley but later developed into a merchant vessel made in Indian dockyards. A large proportion of the ships calling at Masulipatnam, for example, are referred to as *gurabs.* The *patamar* is another term referred to, more common in Malabar and southern India. In south India the *thony* is a generic term, covering vessels ranging from small coasting boats to large oceangoing cargo vessels. This term as well as *vallam* are common to Coromandel, Malabar and Sri Lanka. The southern Indian cargo vessels were broad ark-like unshapely vessels, effective in carrying bulk cargo along the coast. The large-sized Bengal ships are sometimes referred to as junks. Another common vessel on both coasts was the *baggala.* This was a merchant ship of Arab origins but must have been constructed in India in the seventeenth century. The other large numbers of merchant ships are referred to by European names such as yacht, pinnace, sloop, brigantine, galley and frigate. It is not clear from the sources on what basis this distinction was made.

There is much greater diversity in regard to small craft such as coastal boats, landing vessels and river barges. There was a great variety of them in Malabar, plying between the cargo ship out on the roads and the port as well as up the rivers and inland waterways. The *manche* was found all over the Malabar coast upto Kanara. On the east coast the corresponding all-purpose vessel was the *masoola*. Both these were sewn boats, pliable, so as to ride the surf and be beached with their cargo. Besides these, Malabar had a variety of river boats and vessels for the inland waterways. Bengal was the other place with a wide diversity of boats suitable to the conditions of the delta and perennial rivers. The *purgoo* was used in Pipeli and Balesore for loading and unloading cargo ships. *Boora, patell* and *olaka* were types of river boats, among the many such varieties.

There is little evidence of Indian ships adopting the incipient mechanization that European vessels were tending towards. Water in the hold was manually removed with buckets. The pump was not adopted, except in a few ships where these were bought or leased from the Europeans. Nor was the system of pulleys and cranes adopted for loading and unloading. These changes were to occur only in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately there is no account of the cumbersome procedures for loading elephants on to a ship. Indian shipowners were very conscious of costs in an increasingly competitive environment, and this may well have been a factor against taking on technologies that involved substantial initial investment. Besides, there is a general reluctance on the part of Europeans to impart technology. Whenever they did so, they did it at a high price.

Seafaring and employment on ships was a specialization that appears to have been well provided in the seventeenth century. The commercial and shipbuilding areas also produced a large body of people who were suitable for employment on ships. Gujarat produced some of the best ship-hands in this period, and it was easy to recruit crews to man ships from several maritime communities of Kathiawar and north Gujarat. These came both from several Hindu caste groups whose occupation was seafaring and working on ships, as well as domiciled Muslims, perhaps converted from previous Hindu castes, who were employed in the occupa-

tions. Further to the south, in Konkan, there were several maritime groups who were professional mariners among Hindus and Muslims. They were employed in ships owned by Hindus and Muslims. The Portuguese recognized their expertise very early and recruited the bulk of their ship crews from them—the Canarims as they called them. In both Malabar and Kanara the age-old tradition of maritime activity had produced a variety of groups of coastal people living off the sea. They came from several Hindu fishing and seafaring as well as other castes, and from domiciled Muslim communities. The Mapillas were a community of seafarers who provided the manpower for numerous ships and small vessels, as well as the militia on board these vessels. The entire east coast from the southern tip to Orissa was replete with seafaring castes, mostly Hindu. There was also the strong Tamil or Chulia Muslim community of the far south which, like the Mapillas, produced expert seamen. Recruiting a crew anywhere on this coast was no problem. In Bengal the people of the delta and the estuaries of rivers provided mariners for ships of that coast. They came both from Hindu castes and from Muslim communities.

The demand for specialist manpower increased in the second half of the seventeenth century with the increase in Indian shipping and recruitment by Europeans. The Portuguese had begun recruiting in Konkan, Kanara and Malabar. The English continued this in the seventeenth century, leading to an increase in wages for specialist personnel, so much so that they decided to stop recruiting in India and bring young English boys from home. The crew of an Indian vessel had to be versatile in their abilities. Evidence of the eighteenth century on recruitment to vessels owned by the South Indian Chulia Muslims shows how they engaged in cost-saving measures. The lascars they employed worked as artisans and labourers when the ship was in port and, unless so employed, they were not paid wages. The crew doubled up as carpenters, caulkers, riggers, etc. Also, each lascar appears to have been allowed to take a small venture with him. All this would have meant the payment to them of low regular wages. This might have been a particular Chulia practice, whose ventures were community-oriented and kin

networks and patron/client relationships would have operated at sea, as they did on land.

The highest officers on board ship were specialists in their trade, and there was a great demand for their services in the seventeenth century. The nachoda was the superior officer who sailed in the ship. Tibetts defines the nachoda as the owner of the ship who fixes its course and does so on the basis of pre-Portuguese Arab evidence. Other historians refer to the nachoda as the master of the ship who was often also its owner. There is no doubt that in the seventeenth century the nachoda was the person in overall command of the vessel. Ship-owning had acquired a diversity it did not have before. Even if the nachoda was not the owner, besides being in command of the ship he was responsible for the disposal of its cargo, if the merchants who owned the cargo were not sailing on the ship. Thus, the nachoda possessed a dual expertise: that of commanding the ship and taking decisions on its sailing, as well as taking commercial decisions on the purchase and sale of commodities. In this latter function he would have the assistance of *kerranis* or accountants.

Officers who handled the navigation were the *muallim* (pilot), *tandel* (head of crew) and *sarhang* (mate) who supervised docking and landing. Evidence of the happenings on a ship that set sail from Syriam to Madras in 1734 sheds light on the respective responsibilities of officers. The ship struck a reef near the Andaman Islands, sustained damage, and the pilot told the nachoda that they should sail to Melaka, presumably to effect repairs. But the freighters and the nachoda were not agreeable to go to Melaka and the nachoda gave written instructions to the pilot to return to Pegu. He followed these instructions and the ship foundered before reaching Pegu. Gunners occupied an increasingly important position on Indian ships in the seventeenth century. At first they were recruited among Europeans in the coastal areas who then imparted some training to their Indian subordinates. As the Indian ships became routinely armed with heavy guns, specialist Indian gunners were recruited and became a part of the crew.

There seems to have been a substantial passenger traffic in Indian Ocean shipping in the seventeenth century. A number of

merchants took passage on the ships in which they freighted their goods. Their number could be substantial on the major routes, such as Surat to Mokha and Bandar Abbas or Coromandel to Acheh or Bantam. As many as 500 merchants are known to have embarked on a vessel. This merchant traffic would consist not only of merchants travelling with their goods, but also those taking passage to another destination. In the seventeenth century there were Gujarati merchant communities settled in East Africa, Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports. There were Malabar and Coromandel merchant communities settled in Burmese, Siamese, Malay and Sumatran ports. There were Persians settled in different parts of India. The movement between these settler colonies and their homelands would have generated some traffic. Then there was the *haj* traffic, which seems to have increased enormously to the point where the Mughals were building ships to cater to this traffic. Pearson has discussed the nature of this traffic and considered the relationship between pilgrims and venturers. Among this pilgrim traffic were women, mainly of the upper classes of Islamic society, for whom cabin accommodation on ships had to be upgraded. There were those of South East Asian ruling groups who did this pilgrim traffic via Indian ports. There was a considerable trafficking in slaves in ships, both those of Europeans and of Asians. Ships returning to India from the Red Sea would generally carry up to about fifty slaves bought in Mokha or Jeddah. On the eastern side of the Ocean there was heavy trafficking in slaves from Arakan and Chittagong to Coromandel, and then on to South East Asia. The Portuguese and the Dutch were notorious carriers of this traffic cargo in bulk. Mortality rates among slaves on board ship were huge.

After the discovery and publication of Arabic texts and manuals on navigation in the Indian Ocean belonging to the period upto the fifteenth century, there is a long silence relating to Indian Ocean knowledge and techniques of navigation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—how this knowledge was acquired, retained, passed on. Recently there have been commendable attempts to search for this evidence among these maritime seafaring communities. Professors Arunachalam and Lotika Varadarajan have been in the forefront of these activities, and it is to their writings

that we owe our present knowledge on the subject. It appears that Indian pilots had a repository of knowledge on basic navigation skills in written form available to them. These were probably best developed among Gujarati navigation specialists. They were also present among Malabaris, Tamils and Telugus of the Coromandel coast, and probably among Bengalis. Pilots of ships had *rehmanis* or guides written by Indian seamen, and kept *roznama* or record books where they noted information on direction, *tithis*, degrees of longitude, depth of water, itinerary of voyages, direction finding. Arunachalam has uncovered regional maritime charts belonging to Kutchi sailors in the Gujarati script and in the Kutchi dialect. These charts contain directions to sail into particular ports with shoreline silhouettes to help the pilot recognize distinct features. Such knowledge, both written and verbal, must have been in the possession of the major mariner communities and was handed down within these families in the traditional manner.

Among these communities there were rituals and beliefs which were central to their occupations and which contributed to giving them confidence in the pursuit of their hazardous occupations. For Hindu communities, beliefs were adapted to the demands of these occupations and deities with specialist functions of protecting seafarers became central to their worship. In shipbuilding and the launching of ships, auspicious days and signs were looked for and rituals prescribed on these occasions. Animal sacrifice was offered both by Hindu and Muslim communities. The Muslim communities adapted their faith to the needs of their profession. *Pirs* and *dargahs* took on an importance in specific regions and worship was offered to them for the successful outcome of a voyage. In Malabar the sailing season began with rituals on the sea coast. Fishermen's folksongs were a feature all over the coast, and even today these can be heard when groups of fishermen are working together at their tasks. Fishing, boating, seafaring, constructing and launching vessels have all been historically an integral part of the material culture of the maritime zones of India.

10

Conclusion: Maritime India in Retrospect

Historians of maritime India have been taunted by the comments of their professional colleagues to the effect that they deal in artificially designed categories. They have generally replied that generations of historians of India have written as if the coast did not exist as a frontier for the subcontinent. Yet the criticism of maritime history is a real one and poses problems for the maritime historian. Where does the hinterland end? A number of maritime historians, M.N. Pearson significant among them, have grappled with this problem and attempted to solve it in different ways. A. Das Gupta, K.N. Chaudhuri, S. Chaudhuri, Om Prakash, T. Raychaudhuri, S. Subrahmanyam and I have all defined our own frontiers for these maritime zones. Always, there has been a sense of dissatisfaction with self-imposed limits. The coast defines itself, the hinterland is limitless.

Historians who have approached the coast from the ocean have had a relatively less difficult task. This is particularly so where they have taken their standpoint as European activities in the Indian Ocean and their relations with the Asian maritime world. The two sea-borne empire volumes, Portuguese and Dutch, by C.R. Boxer, and the volume by Furber on the pre-imperial phase of Europe–Asia relations, are successful examples of such self-defining perspectives and approaches. K.N. Chaudhuri's attempts to define an Indian Ocean world are interesting in carving out a maritime historical zone in its own right. For those interested in specific regions such as the Indian subcontinent, the Islamic world of West Asia and the South East Asian islands and peninsula, there is much left unsaid. Kenneth McPherson's *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea*, which looks at the Ocean as a cultural and commercial zone, also tries to provide new definitions.

To what extent has my own book been successful in suggesting maritime India of the seventeenth century as a defined area of study, and what general characteristics have emerged of this area? What justification in there for dividing the area into four zones: Gujarat, Malabar–Kanara, Coromandel and Bengal?

These four zones have been presented as being the core regions of distinct trading systems, both in their long-distance economic linkages and in their shorter coastal traffic. By and large, Gujarat and Bijapur look westwards and southwards along the coast, with the western India/Persian Gulf/Southern Arabia/Red Sea commercial nexus emerging as the single most powerful commercial system of the Indian Ocean in our period. Indeed, this century saw the system at its apex, the generator of important economic activity in the northern and central regions of the subcontinent. Malabar and Kanara come through as an unified zone less powerful than Gujarat, with a much more volatile existence, primarily because this was the home of bitter European rivalry and conflict for most of the century. Malabar's traditional westward linkages continued, but its eastward long-distance connections to South East Asia were definitely reduced. Nevertheless, Malabar participated in the steadily growing Asian trade of the seventeenth century right to the end of the period.

Coromandel was another distinct maritime zone with some common characteristics, though the Madura Bay area between the southern tip, Kanyakumari, and Point Calimere, where the coastline turns northwards, was a sub-region of a different type. Coromandel continued its traditional eastward ties to various parts of South East Asia in the seventeenth century. The ports with which it traded varied vigorously in this period, depending on some major changes taking place in South East Asia. Again, the trade was growing steadily throughout the century but there were signs that it had peaked in the last decades and that the decline was beginning.

Bengal was a maritime zone whose features are not as visible as in the other zones of India, and there appears to be some changes in its traditional trading linkages. Perhaps Bengal's long-distance trade suffered at the expense of the expanded role Bengal had in the coastal trade of India.

The maritime zones of India have been aptly described as porous

in character, in contrast to the relative imperviousness of interior India. As zones standing on the frontier between India and countries across the seas, they have characteristics similar in some respects to the Himalayan frontiers of the north-east and north-west. As compared with the other great continental civilization, the Chinese, maritime India has been relatively open of access to indigenous inhabitants and aliens alike. The Chinese imperial state and the Japanese state kept strict control over ingress to and egress from their coastlines. The Chinese had a rigorous system of passes and permits regulating the movement of their subjects along the coast. By contrast, Indian states, neither the large empires nor the states of smaller size, ever attempted to regulate their subjects' coastal movements. This accessibility was extended to aliens as well, where Indian states took a much more relaxed attitude than did the Chinese or Japanese towards the entry of aliens.

Thus, by the beginning of the seventeenth century the maritime regions of India had acquired certain characteristics different from those inland. They were more plural in their population, ethnic, religious and cultural. The orthodoxy prevalent inland was toned down by this pluralism, and there was an openness to innovations and new ideas. At the very least, there was a greater tolerance of differences, and minority groups continued as self-regulating entities with their own lifestyles, without the pressure to conform or assimilate what was prevalent inland. Ports and coastal strips showed some of these features at the beginning of our period. The Islamic element had in this way been successfully integrated into the state system of all the respective states and was prominent in coastal urban societies. Syrian Christian communities had been indigenized and incorporated into the political system. Other alien elements such as Jews and Armenians had also found their respective places. The more recent entrants of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, were in the process of being accepted and assigned a place, with the major difference that in certain centres they were the state authority. They had indeed learnt to follow traditional Indian state ideologies of incorporation and independent coexistence.

During the seventeenth century this process was continued, with new elements being admitted to the structure of maritime

society. Another Islamic element came in some numbers in the Persians. The most traumatic change was the increasing penetration of the Europeans, who introduced elements of speedier transformation by the scale and continuity of their operations and by a tendency to physically settle in certain centres and attract populations to these centres. This added to the pluralism that already existed in certain maritime regions. It also contributed to the expansion of a number of these port outlets and to some degree of urbanization in the maritime zones. The maritime zones, as a consequence, became more prominent in the consciousness of rulers and ruling elites. There is a revealing and fascinating Dutch description of a visit by the Sultan of Golconda to Masulipatnam, on board a Dutch ship, where he was entertained to a lavish meal. Other subordinate inland administrators used to visit the sea coast to acquaint themselves with what was going on in places where they had investments and revenue returns.

Yet there is no evidence that states sought to bring maritime areas more directly under their control. Authority exercised even over important maritime centres was often indirect. As often noted in the discussions above, states did not engage to any great extent in investment in infrastructure in ports. This reluctance extended also to prominent people of the coastal areas, whether merchants, military lords or the administrative nobility. Very little of the capital and profits made from overseas trade was retained in the coastal areas. But it made its way inland to the royal capitals, military camps and administrative centres. It is interesting that though there may have been considerable activity in our period in the construction of religious edifices in the interior of all the states, there is no evidence of new construction in the major ports. The shrines that were started in growing ports like Madras were minor, modest structures. The few Muslim centres of worship that we hear of along the coast, such as the *dargah* to legendary Sufi master Shahul Hamid in Nagore, were probably inaugurated earlier.

There seems some evidence of the deepening of the hinterland of maritime zones of the seventeenth century. Each of the major ports and many minor ones had communications with inland market towns and administrative centres that would be located at

short and long-distances. Road communication must have improved during this period to cope with the rising volume of exports and imports. This was the responsibility of the states and their subordinate regional officials, and it appears to have received more attention than improvements and upgrading in the ports themselves. Deepening of the hinterland is noted in many of the maritime trading regions. It is most pronounced in Gujarat, where the great increase in the exports and imports of Surat induced merchants to tap an ever-deepening hinterland in search of goods. As the demand for textiles, cotton, indigo, rice and wheat increased in overseas markets, these exporters searched for supplies deep into the Indo-Gangetic plains, northward to Sind and Multan, and southwards into Bedar and the northern Deccan. Likewise, when the import trade expanded with European, especially Dutch, imports, there was a similar pressure to search for new markets inland. Most analysts of Gujarat's trade in the seventeenth century are agreed that there was a diversion from the old overland routes through the Khyber and Afghanistan to the sea routes from Gujarat. Thus Gujarat became north and central India's major frontier with the outside world.

Coromandel was another region with an expanding hinterland, though distances were not as great. All along this coast there is evidence in the seventeenth century of the great increase in demand for textiles for export, forcing merchants deeper into inland weaving centres. One particular example of this was in the great Dutch and English demand for longcloth which could not be supplied from the existing centres along the coastal strip. Merchants started going into Salem for their supplies, thus bringing these weaving centres into the export market. Similar extensions westwards are seen in the north Coromandel area, where again the pressures of demand forced merchants to go inland to Warangal, Nagalavanche and neighbouring centres. The pressure of the import trade also made merchants venture out further inland. The demand for imports in the coastal belt of Coromandel was always poor, and to dispose of the variety of imports generated by European trade it was necessary to venture further in. In central Coromandel these merchants were venturing into Salem, Bangalore and Mysore. In the north the

Masulipatnam import trade had relied on the nexus with the capital city of Golconda/Hyderabad. But merchants were venturing further northwards into Bedar and Rajasthan, and westwards into the Doab area, in search of markets.

The coastal trade of south Coromandel, Madura Bay and Malabar formed an active subsystem in the broader maritime trade of India. This trade had led to close contacts between people inhabiting the coast, as well as to broadly similar shipping, seafaring and navigational traditions. An interesting example of the sensitivity of such subsystems is seen in the reaction to Portuguese and Dutch attempts to impose on it and coerce it with their demands. When this happened, the land routes from west coast to east coast which had not been overly used with the expansion of sea traffic, were revived actively. Coromandel, which used to be supplied with Malabar pepper by the sea route, began in the second half of the seventeenth century to be supplied by the land route. This reversal of a long-term trend shows the quick adaptability of networks of trade during this period, and the response of participants to any interruption that occurred.

Bengal, by the nature of its geography, was not sharply divided, as were the other zones discussed above, into 'maritime' and 'inland'. Riverine tracts enabled a close integration between water-borne and land traffic. There was no coastal population as such with maritime traditions similar to those in the other regions. Water-borne traffic by river went deep into the interior, and large quantities of goods were transported in this way. Silk and textile producing villages and market towns were located in short and long distances along these rivers and creeks. The exit ports of Hughli, Balesore and Pipeli derived their goods from the districts of Murshidabad, Dacca, Maimansinh, Maldah, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Bardwan. Bengal did not consume any great quantity of the major imports of the day, and there was no pressure to search for markets further inland. The Ganges provided an artery for travel into the interior. But the markets of the upper Gangetic valley appear to have been supplied with imports such as spices and copper from Gujarat rather than from Bengal.

A development that was taking place in the latter part of the

seventeenth century was the increasing use of sea transport for the movement of foodgrains within the subcontinent. What this meant was that hinterlands were being fed with supplies through the maritime areas, whereas previously the seacoast and ports were relying on supplies from the hinterland. This had important implications for maritime–hinterland relations. When ports and the coast relied on food supplies from their hinterland, this was a constraint on their unrestricted growth. Food prices were always higher along the coast than inland, and this was a disincentive to the shift of population towards coastal centres. When foodgrains were moved at relatively lower cost from coast to coast, the movement being determined by demand and supply, price levels evened out. Surplus areas could supply deficit areas, and serious shortages could be avoided in the maritime zones. There is increasing evidence of people moving towards the ports in time of scarcity and famine inland. Indeed, the phenomenon of families sélling themselves to slavery in the coastal ports to avoid death by starvation is seen in Coromandel after the great famine of 1658–9. This coincided with a succession of agricultural crises in southern India in the last two decades of the seventeenth century. These factors lead to a growth in population in the European settlements along this coast. Maritime–hinterland relations began a slow process of transformation as a result.

Did the commercial activity of the seventeenth century make a difference to the lives of the ordinary people of the coast? Was there any visible change to the standards of living of maritime people? There is no direct evidence pertaining to these matters. But some speculative hypotheses may be put forward on a total and qualitative reading of whatever evidence is available. There is no doubt that opportunities for employment expanded as a result of commercial activity. Specialist mariners and seafarers were in great demand to man the large number of ships. Those who were engaged in small boat traffic between ship and shore and up the estuaries of rivers and inland waters would have experienced a boom in their services. Other skilled craftsmen also would have been in demand to serve the increasing building activity in port-towns. There would have been a similar demand for unskilled labour. Wages along the coast

were somewhat higher than wages inland, but for most of the century food prices along the coast would also have been higher.

That there was no perceived improvement in levels of life along the coast is seen from the fact that, throughout the century, there was no marked movement of population from the hinterland to the port-towns. The Growth of population in these towns did not match the expansion of commerce. To what extent there was a free labour market in these areas is difficult to determine. The traditional constraints on migration continued to operate in the seventeenth century. It is significant that there was no marked migration of weavers from interior villages to coast. There appears to have been some shift in Gujarat where, in the seventeenth century, weaving became an urban occupation rather than a primarily rural one, as in Coromandel. The weaving centres around Surat were townships rather than villages with an attachment to the land, as in Coromandel.

The primary responsibility for the lack of development of maritime zones rests with the merchant groups of the different regions, their social organization, attitudes and ideologies. In discussing the merchants of the coast above, it was argued that they made their money on the coast and across the ocean but invested and spent it inland. Though there was considerable merchant mobility both in the west coast and in the east, it was work-related. There was a reluctance to migrate permanently and settle near places of commercial activity. Even a mobile merchant community like the Telugu Komatties did not settle in the ports where they were most active. Hindu merchant communities of the west and east coasts did not become urbanized. This led to another significant characteristic, the absence of continuity in a particular sector of commerce through generations. The generational link begins from the end of the seventeenth century, first in the European settlements. Capital is not concentrated, it tends to disperse into a number of ventures of similar size. Entrepreneurs appear, flourish and disappear, to be succeeded by others.

The case of two coastal maritime merchant communities, their continuity and resilience, serves to underline the weaknesses and the transitory character of Hindu merchants: the Mapillas of

Malabar and the Maraikkar and Lebbais of Coromandel. These two communities were active throughout the seventeenth century and survived into the eighteenth, representing the few continuous elements of 'traditional' Asian trade into the era of domination by Europeans. Both communities had their own firm coastal bases, enjoyed a degree of political and considerable cultural autonomy, and were exclusively maritime communities with little inland connections. These characteristics made them less vulnerable to external changes and enabled them to act with self-reliance. The other state which was to expand its commerce in the eighteenth century, the kingdom of Travancore, showed the vital importance of locating power along the coast, something that few of the Indian states appreciated in this period. Apart from these two domiciled and naturalized Islamic communities, there were others that were in the process of becoming maritime communities towards the end of the seventeenth century. Among these could be counted the Gujarati Muslims of diverse origins, the Saraswat Brahmins of Goa, the Parsis of Bombay, the Konkanis of the Kanara coast, diverse Telugu and Tamil Chetty sub-castes of Coromandel, and some naturalized Muslim communities of Bengal.

An important development in maritime India was a north–south integration that took place in the seventeenth century, to complement the maritime–hinterland linkages that had always been present. This happened in the overall context of commercial expansion which, it has been repeatedly argued, was a feature of the seventeenth century. The expansion of shipping, the accessibility of navigation technology and the increase in sea traffic led to the movement of goods within the subcontinent by sea as well as by land. Both in the west coast of India as well as on the east coast, there is every evidence of increasing volumes of goods being moved over long and short distances by sea. In this way Gujarat, Kanara and Malabar became integrated into a commercial system. Likewise, in the east coast Bengal and the entire distance of Coromandel became closely knit. Gujarat became more aware of Malabar and vice-versa. Bengal and Coromandel became more aware of each other. Through these linkages peoples of the different regions of India were consuming each others' products, agricultural and in-

dustrial. Also, some centres of the coast were performing an entrepôt function of feeding goods from other regions of India into the Indian Ocean trading system. Surat, Masulipatnam and Porto Novo were centres functioning in this way.

In conceiving maritime India in the seventeenth century, it is necessary to recognize the world that lay at the end of the trade routes emanating from Indian ports. From the discussion above it is clear that Gujarat and Bijapur had a special relationship with the Persian Gulf and Red Sea ports, and that the movement of population and the exchange of commodities between these coastal regions had long-term social and cultural consequences. Later, this seems to have extended southwards along the East African coast, leading to Gujarati settlements in these parts in the eighteenth century. On the east coast of India the nexus was between Coromandel and South East Asia, at first very closely with the Melaka Straits areas of Malaya and Sumatra, and with west and north Java. Later, there is a northward shift to Burma and southern Thailand but with strong continuing ties with west Malayan sultanates. Coromandel interests penetrated the states systems in these parts and left marked social influences there. These links had a greater continuity than those of the west. They persisted into the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as important changes took place in these regions. It is difficult to assess what kinds of influences were exerted by the trading partner societies on Indian maritime peoples. The return of pious *haj* pilgrims in large numbers to their towns and villages would have strengthened Islamic practice and orthodoxy. The trade routes provided Islamic culture goods from West Asia for Muslim communities and kept alive the cultural affinities. There is no evidence of a similar bringing back of cultural artifacts from South East Asia. Here the traffic seems to have been primarily one way, with the exception that there would have been some changes in food habits brought back by those with a long sojourn in a South East Asian port.

To sum up, maritime India benefited from the liberal regime that all Indian states permitted along the coast, and the autonomy they gave to the communities that dwelt there. This enabled the littoral to develop in a fashion complementary to the interior and

to function with little interference from groups that would not have understood the needs and demands of the predominant activity of commerce. It enabled the merchants of the coast to establish their own *modus vivendi* with the territorial regime. Yet, this point of view cannot be pressed too far because it is not as if the territorial power was not aware of the potential of maritime zones: they were becoming increasingly aware of this as the seventeenth century progressed. This remarkable awareness is amply demonstrated in the middle decades of the century on the part of the largest territorial empire, the Mughals. The small states of the Deccan and the south were also becoming increasingly aware, in varying degrees. Yet this did not lead to an attempt to integrate the coast totally into the administration of the state. No major urban centres, market towns, military camps or pilgrimage centres, with the exception of Surat, grew along the coast. No substantial military power was located in or near the coast. The one exception was the Marathas, for a brief period, under Shivaji. The coast continued as an area through which profit was channelled to the interior.

No state thought it proper to spend money to defend this source. Thus, maritime India was throughout the seventeenth century a defenceless source of wealth to the state. States did react to any threats and interruptions to their sources of wealth, but this was essentially a reactive approach. At the very end of the seventeenth century, even in the mighty Mughal empire, maritime zones were isolated areas defended by provincial and district administrators, receiving imperial attention only in times of serious crises, such as the Anglo-Mughal war of 1686–9. In such a situation, the coast could become a bridgehead to the inland, by forces inclined to make it so.